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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the Goal is reached..

THUS SPOKE SHRI RAMAKRISHNA

Many are the names of God

As one and the same water is called by different names in different languages, one calling it "Water", another "Vari", a third "aqua", and a fourth "pani", so the one Sachchidananda, Absolute Being-Intelligence-Bliss, is invoked by some as God, by some as Allah, by some as Hari, and by others as Brahman.

Two persons were hotly disputing as to the colour of a chameleon. One said, "The chameleon on that palm-tree is of a beautiful red colour". The other contradicted him saying, "You are mistaken, the chameleon is not red, but blue." Being unable to settle the matter by argument, both went to a man who lived under that tree and had watched the chameleon in all its phases of colour. One of the disputants said, "Is not the chameleon on that tree of a red colour?" The man replied, "Yes, sir." The other disputant said, "What do you say? How is that? Surely it is not red, but blue!" The man humbly replied, "Yes, sir, it is blue." He knew that the chameleon constantly changed its colour; so he said, "Yes", to both these questions. Sachchidananda likewise has various forms. The devotee who has seen Him on one aspect only, knows that aspect alone. But he alone who has seen Him in manifold aspects can say, "All these forms are of one God, for God is multiform."

Many are the names of God and infinite the forms through which He may be approached. In whatever name and form you worship Him, through that He will be realised by you.

Four blind men went to see an elephant. One who touched its leg said, "The elephant is like a pillar." The second who touched the trunk said, "The elephant is like a thick club." The third touched the belly and thought it to be like a big jar. The fourth who felt the ears, concluded that the elephant was like a winnowing fan. They then began to dispute amongst themselves as to the figure of the animal they had touched. A passer-by hearing them quarrel said, "What is it that you are disputing about?" Then they stated the question and asked him to arbitrate. He said, "Not one of you knows the real elephant. As a whole, it is neither like a pillar, nor like a jar, nor like a winnowing-fan, nor like a club. But its legs are like pillars, its belly like a big jar, its ears like a winnowing-fan, and its trunk like a thick club. The elephant itself is a combination of all these." In exactly the same manner do men quarrel amongst themselves about religion, each having seen some different aspect of the Deity.

(From "Teachings of Shri Ramakrishna," P. 248-250)

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is on SHRI RAMAKRISHNA—SAVIOUR WITH THE GOSPEL OF HARMONY.

HARMONY OF RELIGIONS (INDIA'S UNIQUE RESPONSE TO FOREIGN RELIGIOUS REFUGEES) is collected from a talk by Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

EDUCATION AND SOCIALIZATION OF THE YOUTH IN THE VEDIC PERIOD is by Dr. Roma Chakraborty, M.A., Ph. D. of Calcutta.

NARAYAN SHASTRI, an investigative study into the less-known and unknown facts

relating to this early sannyasi disciple of Shri Ramakrishna, is by Swami Ekatmananda of the Ramakrishna Mission.

SEWA-RURAL: A STORY OF INSPIRED DEDICATION is a short article by a representative of the *Prabuddha Bharata* who went to visit this outstanding institution offering medical and other services to the backward tribals and other people in the semi-desert areas of Bharuch District, Gujarat.

THE GENETS—A STORY OF LIFE-LONG SACRIFICE, by Swami Tathagatananda, Head, Vedanta Society, New York, is the story of life-long dedication of two sisters and a mother for the cause of Vedanta in U.S.A.

SHRI RAMAKRISHNA—SAVIOUR WITH THE GOSPEL OF HARMONY

(Editorial)

When the Dakshineswar temple complex with the shrines of various Hindu gods and goddesses like Kali, Krishna and Shiva was finally established in 1855, little did the founders realise that from this temple compound will one day emerge a great saviour of harmony who would pave the way for the survival of warring mankind by the message of the unity and harmony of all religions. In this temple of Dakshineswar Shri Ramakrishna for the first time practised all modes of Hindu sadhana. And then breaking all the bounds of Hinduism, and even surpassing the dreams of most liberal thinkers, he practised for the first time in human history, Islam and Christianity.

Today Ramakrishna's own life brings hope to the people of all faiths. The Ramakrishna temple at Belur with its unique

combination of Islamic, Christian and Hindu architectural tradition, speaks eloquently of the spirit of harmony it stands for. The centres of the Ramakrishna Order where the pictures of the prophets like Christ, Buddha, Mahavira, Zarathushtra and others, and symbols of different religions are installed in the campus stand out like oasis to humanity today which is threatened by the dark angels of fundamentalism, bigotry, and fanaticism.

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In 1986, in the height of Iran-Iraq war, a fight between the Shiah and Sunni factions of Islam, some 400 teenagers were picked up from the streets of Iran and sent to war fronts without any information to parents. According to Red Cross estimate more than 35,000 Iranians were then in Iraqi

prison. 45,000 Iranians and 20,000 Iraqis were already killed by 1986 March. Iran declared 1986 as 'the year of determination' and 'the year to end the war in gulf' with a sure victory of Iran, before the end of the Iranian year on 20 March, 1987¹. Today the war is over. None has won. The Middle East is in ruins whose end was brought by the wrath of fanatics' love of their own form of religion.

More than 20 years ago Lebanon President Kemal Jamlatt came to India in search of peace. Finally he came to Belur Math and took Shri Ramakrishna's Gospel of the harmony and unity of all religions as the philosophy to end inter-religious war. He was killed by the members of the Drudge Community.² Middle East rejected the saving gospel of the age. Still it is burning in the flames of fanatics' fights.

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Fanaticism cannot stand reason. Galileo's discovery that earth moves round the sun, went against the authority of the church which held that it is the sun which moves round the earth. The great master of reason was forced to kneel before the dreaded office of holy inquisition which showed him the terrible instruments of torture. In mortal fear Galileo had to admit that the earth does not move, it is the sun which moves round the earth. Immediately after the inquisition, as the apocryphal story goes, the great master was again heard to mutter, 'but it does move'.

"Truth does not pay homage to any society, ancient or modern. Society has to pay homage to truth or die", said Vivekananda. After 350 years of Galileo incident, Pope Paul II, told a gathering of scientists in 1983, "that the church's experiences during

the Galileo's affair and after, had 'led to a more mature attitude and to a more accurate grasp of its own authority.'"³

Giordano Bruno, an original thinker, had the unique experience, as Einstein put it, "that what man perceives of this world depends on his positions in space and time." His thoughts, today verified by Relativity, stood against the dogmas of the medieval church. He was burnt at the stakes. During the last moments he only cautioned his religious henchmen with a prophetic utterance: "It is with a far greater fear that you pronounce this sentence to be burned, than I receive it."⁴

Teilherd Chardin, a Jesuit father, found it impossible to accept the concept 'Original Sin' since science proved that man evolved not from Adam and Eve, but from lower forms. In 1924, a Vatican decree warned Catholic intellectuals against the "Dangerous spirit of enquiry abroad in the modern world." Teilherd was ordered to sign a pledge that he would never again say or write 'anything contrary to the church's traditional position on original sin'. Teilherd refused. He said, "I stand condemned, by dolts and ignoramuses. I...have just one choice—to be perfect religious, or to be excommunicate." As a scientist he came to the conclusion that Christ-power, the 'Cosmic Christ', is evolving within all of us, even the lower forms of life. This process he called *Christogenesis*. This rational and Vedantic ideal could be published in his masterpiece '*The Phenomenon of Man*' by his friends only after his death. Before death he only expected that in future the church-council would be open to new thought in every area. "The time has come to save

1. *News Time* (daily), Hyderabad, 4 August, 1986, P. 8.

2. *The Week* (Malayalese Manorama, Weekly.) 19 to 26 January 1986, P. 26.

3. Allwyn Fernandes (Article in *Times of India*, Sunday Review), March 5, 1989.

4. William Hermanns: *Einstein and the Poet: In Search of Cosmic Man*, Branden Press Inc. Brookline Village, M.A. U.S.A. 1983, P. 66.

Christ from clerics, in order to save the world," he said with all his love for Christ and his church.⁵

It is Shri Ramakrishna's life which inspired his foremost disciple Vivekananda to declare to the world, "Arts, Science, and Religion are but various ways to realise the Truth. But in order to understand it one must practise Advaita." Advaita or Monistic Vedanta is the ultimate goal of all true seekers of God. Standing upon this highest cliff of spiritual realisation, one can look at the world and the different avenues to Godhead with calmness, love and respect. That is why, Shri Ramakrishna insisted that Narendra must be established in the knowledge of the One Impersonal Reality, and taught him the highest monistic scriptures like *Ashtavakra Samhita*. In the philosophy of Advaita, Vivekananda found the only solution of all conflicts between science and religion. That is why, he said in the West in 1895, "The salvation of Europe depends on a rationalistic religion, and Advaita—the non-duality, the oneness, the idea of the Impersonal God—is the only religion that can have any hold on any intellectual people."⁶

Today due to the explosion of new physics, great scientists like Schrodinger, Heisenberg and others have admitted that the ideas of modern science and Advaita Vedanta are perfectly compatible and that the solution to the problems of modern science lies in the perfectly rational ideas of Advaita Vedanta which asserts a fundamental unity between matter and mind, and the living and the non-living. Eminent writer of the West, Amaury De Reinourt, in his book: *The Eye of Shiva*, wrote that it is

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in whose monistic interpretation of Vedanta the conflict between reason and religion is gone for ever.

From its modern awakening with Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda Eastern mysticism has begun to adapt its revelations to the entirely different cultural framework provided by science and technology, without in any way sacrificing what is valid in its traditional understanding of the phenomenon itself.⁷

Even genuine spiritual experience had met with the wrath of bigots and fundamentalists. The ruthless extermination of thousands of Sufis and other Islamic mystics, are well-known today. Meister Eckhart who experienced the Godhead as an all-pervading unity, was indicted as a heretic by medieval church. The age-old Catholic-Protestant conflict had once decimated the population of Germany. That conflict continues even today.

Within the bounds of Hinduism orthodoxy reigned in different periods of history. Sometimes the Hindu fanaticism reached ludicrous heights. The quarrel between the Ten-gelai and Bade-gelai sects in South India over the marking of religious symbols on elephants' heads, reached Privy Council in England. In mid-nineteenth century Bengal, the Vaishnavites would not touch the bel-leaves meant for worshipping Shiva, or the Shaktas would not touch a leaf of the book of *Bhagavatam*. In the name of religion caste-restrictions were created and the lower caste people were denied the major privileges of education and social power. But whenever such situations prevailed, sages and epoch-makers like Buddha, Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Kabir, Dadu, Guru Nanak, Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda appeared on the Indian scene and established the divinity of all souls,

5. Dr. Beatrice Brutean: *Teilherd De Chardin, Cosmos* (Published from Australia), May 1981.

6. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati Memorial Edn.), Vol. II, P. 139

7. Amaury De Reinourt, *The Eye of Shiva*, (New York: William Marrow and Company Inc, 1981), P. 501

and saved the masses from the priestly exploitations. Yet with all the horrors of casteism and don't touchism, Hinduism never reached the fanaticism of credal wars, like other fanatical faiths.

* * * *

Why does religion breed fanaticism ?

Fanaticism is born of limited and strait-jacketed thinking of the followers of fundamentalist faiths whose brains, as Vivekananda pointed out in *Raja Yoga*, refuse to open new channels for imbibing new thoughts. They react to any idea beyond their known regions of thought. Such fanaticism becomes all the more murderous when it is explicitly recommended by the leaders of these faiths that any one not following the faith should either be converted or killed. Such 'Brain Washing' is the easiest way to inspire fanatics for a 'Holy War' against anyone not conforming to their faith. "The same man who is kind, good, honest and loving to people of his own opinion, will not hesitate to do the vilest deeds when they are directed against persons beyond the pale of his own religious brotherhood," said Vivekananda.⁸

Historian Arnold J. Toynbee, known as "International saint of modern West," was an ardent votary of Christianity as the saving grace to mankind. He wrote,

"Christianity's fundamental is, as I see it, a belief that Self-sacrificing love is both the best and the most powerful of impulses that are known to us. ...but my holding of this essential Christian belief does not make me a Christian for the Christianity is the religion of the Christian church, and the church is an institution. I cannot call myself a Christian unless I know that I shall be recognised by constitutional authorities as being one, and I know that I should not pass the more elementary tests of Christian orthodoxy. ...

...I cannot believe that this or any particular prophet can have been the last of the prophets. The human race has still an expectation of about

2000 million years more of existence on this planet. If it is true that "Where there is no vision, people perish", how could a God who is deemed to be loving and omnipotent leave his children to perish at the dawn of their history ?"⁹

With a historian's regret, he again wrote, 'If Christian theology—at least as interpreted by the Augustinian-Calvinist-Jansenist School—is true, God is a monster.'¹⁰

It is in India, Vivekananda declared, that a broad catholicity of religion has been practised for centuries. He explained the Indian view of the catholicity of religions:

"Every sect of every religion presents only one ideal of its own to mankind, but the eternal Vedantic religion opens to mankind an infinite number of doors for ingress into the inner shrine of divinity, and places before humanity an almost inexhaustible array of ideals, there being in each of them a manifestation of the Eternal One."

"It is here and here alone that they build temples and churches for the religions which have come with the object of condemning our own religion."¹¹

This was the message of Shri Ramakrishna, and, according to Toynbee, this message is "Indian's contribution to the world harmony." He says,

"This recognition of the manysidedness of religious insight and experience was part of Shri Ramakrishna's message. It was also part of his life, because his life and his message cannot be distinguished from each other.

...I myself believe that Hinduism has seen further into the truth than the Western religions have. I also believe that the Indian understanding of the truth is of supreme significance and value for the human race today."

And Ramakrishna's message, Toynbee feels, is "particularly important today when

9. Arnold J. Toynbee, *Experiences*. Oxford University Press, 1969, P. 136.

10. Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Historian's Approach to Religion*, Oxford University Press, 1956, P. 162.

11. *The Complete Works*; Vol. III, P. 187.

8. *The Complete Works*, Vol. III. P. 33.

the peoples of the world are facing each other at close quarter armed with careful weapons. The Exclusive-minded temper is always wrong, but today it is more dangerous than it has ever been."¹²

* * * *

That gull sees the furthest which flies the highest. Like Jonathan Seagull, Shri Ramakrishna flew far above the limited visions of ethnical religions based on a particular god, a particular prophet, or a book. From the height of the highest spiritual realisation in Advaita (monistic) sadhana, Ramakrishna saw One God permeating everywhere, answering the prayers of humanity irrespective of language, nation, creed, or custom. From that height Ramakrishna said, "All jackals howl in the same way there." He "meant to say that just as all jackals howl in the same way, so each of those who attained the Nirvikalpa plane, has said the same thing about God, the cause of the Universe, as viewed from that plane."¹³

In this realisation of the Impersonal Absolute, Ramakrishna's guru was Tota Puri, a monk belonging to the Naga Sect. For Tota Puri there was only one Reality, the non-dual Absolute, and this Absolute (Brahman) could best be known by realising it as identical with one's own essence (Atman).

When the practice began, Tota Puri asked him to rise above the worship of the goddess Kali in whose worship Shri Ramakrishna had so long devoted his life and heart. This was essential in order to have the realisation of Brahman without form, qualities or

attributes. Like Meister Eckhart, he had to 'renounce God for God's sake.'¹⁴

Ramakrishna said of this experience: "Then with a stern determination I again sat to meditate and as soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared before me, I used my power of discrimination as a sword and with it severed her form in two. There remained no more obstruction to my mind, which at once soared beyond the relative plane, and I was lost in samadhi (super-consciousness)".

Within three days Ramakrishna succeeded in this most difficult task of attaining *nirvikalpa samadhi*. He experienced the Impersonal, by totally denying the Personal God, the Divine Mother, with whom he was so long identified.

This Advaita Sadhana gave him another experience—the Truth of Buddhism. The purest form of Buddhism and Advaita Sadhana may be equally labelled as the path of knowledge. Both discard the Personal God and all dualistic thoughts and forms of worship. Both insist on moral perfection, contemplation of the unreality of the objective world, and withdrawal of the mind completely from the illusory existence. Only Advaita Vedanta prescribes meditation on the reality of the human soul and its oneness with the Absolute Brahman. The goal, the *nirvana* of the Buddhist corresponds, in a way to the *nirvikalpa samadhi* of the Advaitin.¹⁵

Shri Ramakrishna looked upon the Buddha as an Incarnation of God, thus sharing the general notion of the Hindus regarding that Teacher. On a certain occa-

12. Arnold J. Toynbee (Article on East and West), *Bhavan's Journal*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavana, October 1971, P. 136.

13. Swami Saradananda, *The Great Master*, R.K. Math, Madras-4, 1978, P. 688, 694.

14. Claude Allan Stark, *God of All*, (Shri Ramakrishna's approach to Religious Harmony) Claude Stark, Inc, Cape Cod, M.A. 02670, U.S.A. 1974, P. 60.

15. Quoted in *God of All*, Pp. 57-58.

sion he remarked, 'There is not the least doubt about the Lord Buddha's being an Incarnation. There is no difference between his doctrines and those of the Vedic *jnana-kanda*.' When told that the Buddha was called an atheist, Shri Ramakrishna said, "Why atheist? He was no atheist—only he could not speak out his realisation. Do you know what 'Buddha' means? To become One with '*Bodha*',—the Supreme intelligence, through deep meditation, to become Pure intelligence itself."¹⁶

After Shri Ramakrishna's Advaita experience, he had the knowledge that his existence was inseparable from the existence of all living creation. He saw the grasses alive on the lawn. He could not walk over them. He went through this period for some time. When two boatmen quarrelled and one slapped the other, from a distance Ramakrishna felt the shock of pain. His life showed the meaning of true *ahimsa* or non-injury which was a cardinal tenet of Mahavira of Jainism.¹⁷

Within six months of his completion of Advaita Sadhana under Tota Puri, Shri Ramakrishna, a Hindu, entered for the first time into Islamic Sadhana. His teacher in Islamic devotion was a Sufi mystic named Govinda Rai, who came eventually to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar and found it suitable to his spiritual practices and had made it his temporary home. A Hindu by birth, Govinda Rai had accepted the Islamic tradition of Sufis which suited his temperament. Govinda's sincere devotion to Allah attracted Shri Ramakrishna. He now felt a spontaneous urge to worship Allah not because he was dissatisfied with his earlier practices, but out of love to know God through the other avenues to Godhead. He sought initiation from Govinda Rai in the Sufi tradition. Shri Ramakrishna thus be-

came a Muslim, and set his mind and heart completely in realising the grace of God as Allah, through Sufi prayers. Ramakrishna himself spoke of this experience,

"I devoutly repeated the name of Allah, wore a cloth like the Arab Moslems, said their prayers five times daily and felt disinclined even to see images of the Hindu gods and goddesses, much less worship them—for the Hindu way of thinking had disappeared altogether from my mind. I spent three days in that mood, and I had the full realisation of the sadhana of their faith."¹⁸ Shri Ramakrishna also said that he had a vision of a shining impressive personage with a long beard. This figure merged into Ishvara (personal God) and then merged into Brahman.

Ramakrishna did not clearly state whether the "radiant person with long beard" and grave appearance was the Prophet Mohammed himself, or one of his companions, or a great Sufi saint. Hindu seekers of God know that sometimes perfected souls choose to maintain his separate identity in subtle body in order to continue as an instrument of salvation for others much like the *bodhi-sattvas*, the perfected souls, in compassion for humanity.¹⁹

In his super-conscious experience in Islamic Sadhana Shri Ramakrishna merged his identity with Allah, the Absolute. Many Sufi mystics, like Ramakrishna, experienced the Truth of '*Ana'l-Haqq*', 'I am the Truth'. Rumi, the Sufi mystic, illustrates this Sufi realisation of the individual soul merging in the Impersonal Absolute in the following words:

"The man who says *Ana'l-Abd*, 'I am the slave of God', affirms two existences, his own and God's but he that says *Ana'l-Haqq*, 'I am

16. Ibid., P. 68.

17. Ibid., P. 67.

18. Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, (London, Methuen, 1965), P. 124.

19. *The Great Master*, P. 300.

God', i.e. 'I am naught, He is all; there is no being but God's. This is the extreme of humility and self-abasement.'²⁰

Ramakrishna's disciples believed that their Master's historic practice of the Islamic mysticism will one day break the age old barrier that stands between Hinduism and Islam. His biographer-disciple Swami Saradananda wrote,

"He demonstrated that, although there existed a mountain like wall of partition between the Hindus and the Muslims, on account of mutually contradictory social manners, etc., the religious faiths of both were true; that though worshipping the same God in different ways and going forward along different paths, both of them could, in course of time, be one in love, forgetting the age-long quarrels."²¹

Ramakrishna's experience of Christ came after he came in contact with a wealthy Hindu lover of Christ, Sambhu Charan Mallik. Although not a Christian himself, Mallik was the first to read to Ramakrishna from the Bible and speak to him of Jesus of Nazareth. After listening to Mallik, Ramakrishna's thoughts soon began to dwell upon the personality of Jesus. Ramakrishna found no difficulty to take another great spiritual flight beyond the limits of his own Hindu faiths. The phenomenon of Christ drew him. Soon he had the first vision of child-Christ on the lap of Mother Mary in the garden-house of Jadu Nath Mallik at Dakshineswar. There Shri Ramakrishna was looking attentively at a picture of the Madonna with the Divine Child and reflecting on the wonderful life of Christ, "When he felt as though the picture had become animated, and that rays of light were emanating from the figures of Mary and Christ, and entering into him, altogether changing his mental outlook."²²

The vision totally overtook him and for the time being eclipsed all his old habits and rituals of Hindu faith. When he returned to the Dakshineswar temple, he was so engrossed in the thought of Christ and Mary, that he forgot to visit the Divine Mother in the temple which was his habit for many years. For three days those ideas held sway over his mind. On the fourth day, as he was walking in the grove of Panchavati, he saw an extra-ordinary, foreign-looking person of serene aspect approaching him with his gaze intently fixed on him. He had a beautiful pair of large eyes, and though the nose was a little flat, it in no way marred the sublime calmness of his face. Shri Ramakrishna was charmed and wondered who he might be. Soon the figure drew near, and from the inmost recesses of his heart Shri Ramakrishna heard the voice, "There is the Christ who poured out his heart's blood for the redemption of mankind and suffered agonies for its sake. It is none else but that Master-Yogin Jesus, the embodiment of Love!"

The figure of Christ, the Son of Heavenly Father, embraced Shri Ramakrishna, the child of Divine Mother, and became merged in him. After sometime when he came back to the normal plane, Shri Ramakrishna was convinced that Jesus Christ was an Incarnation of God.²³

Although Shri Ramakrishna had succeeded in having the mystic experience of the presence of Absolute through Islamic prayers, he could never accept the fundamental tenet of orthodox Islam that Allah is the only name of God, or Mohammed his prophet (*La-Ilha, Allah-Mohammaduru-Rasul-llah*). Similarly in Ramakrishna's experience:

Jesus was the Son of God, but never the only one. He said,

20. *God of All*, P. 77.

21. *The Great Master*, P. 639.

22. *Life of Shri Ramakrishna*; Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, Pp. 253-55.

23. *Ibid.*

"The Avatara (Incarnation) is always one and the same. Having plunged into the ocean of life, the one God rises up at one point and is known as Krishna, and when after another plunge, he rises up at another point, He is known as Christ. ...The Incarnations are to Brahman (the Absolute) as waves are to the ocean".²⁴

After these sadhanas Ramakrishna's life itself became a perpetual parliament of religions. Seekers of God belonging to all communities would then flock to his room where the words like "Exclusiveness" or "Intolerance" were forgotten forever. "How monotonous!" were his words of reprimand to the disciple who could not feel delight in any but a particular aspect of the Divine Lord. He used these words in such a way that the disciple had to hide his face in shame", wrote his disciple Saradananda.²⁵

How will the Christians accept Ramakrishna's experience of Christ?

"Christianity" says Mr. Claude Allan Stark, "Like Islam, is eschatological. The aim is salvation through faith at the end of time. A religious aspirant is not expected to bounce in and out of the parameters of the Christian faith merely to experience Christ. What of the rites of baptism, confirmation and, most centrally, the Eucharist? Is it possible even to 'Practise' Christianity otherwise? Finally, the question of fellowship arises: is it enough to know Jesus personally as the Beloved and Saviour, without participating in the fellowship of his Church, the covenant community of the faithful?" Mr. Stark says that Ramakrishna's experience is true because it is a direct, valid experience.²⁶ Direct spiritual experience does not need either the sanction of priests or ecclesiastical authorities. Such an experience leaves behind on the experiencer a stamp of a

divine transfiguration for the rest of one's life, and the world knows the validity of such experience by the elevated spiritual life of the person.

The murderer Paul was suddenly transfigured into St. Paul by a vision of Christ. Doctor Lucanas, the Greek royal doctor of the Raman emperor, was similarly transformed into St. Luke only by the promptings of an inner voice, the voice of Christ. The little shepherd girl of France, Joan was inspired to great action by the voice of Christ within. She was subsequently canonised as St. Joan. None of these three was baptised or none participated in Church communion with priests. "Faith is not belief, it is a grasp on the Ultimate", said Swami Vivekananda.

Today Shri Ramakrishna is being adored and worshipped even by the followers of Christ. Romain Rolland, a Christian, saw in Ramakrishna a rebirth of Christ.

"It is always the same Man—the Son of Man, the Eternal, our Son, our God reborn, with each return he reveals himself a little more fully, and more enriched by the universe.

Allowing for differences of country and of time, Ramakrishna is the younger brother of our Christ."²⁷

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Horrors of fanaticism and exclusivism influenced the global fields of politics, too. Philip Noel-Baker, recipient of the Nobel-peace Prize in 1959, wrote: "When the first world war ended in 1918, the peoples cried with a loud voice, 'Never again'!"²⁸

But nothing could resist the coming of the second world war. And this time the fire of aggression was further inflamed by the winds of religious exclusivism. Hitler's hatred of the Jews was doubly strengthened

24. *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna* (Tr. Swami Nikhilananda), New York, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, P. 864.

25. *The Great Master*, P. 776.

26. *God of All*, Pp. 82-83.

27. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna* Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1970, Pp. 11-12.

28. P.H.P. (P.H.P. International Japan, August 1975), P. 4.

when he received the church's decree to exterminate the Jews. The Church signed a concord with Hitler on 20th July, 1933 after Hitler declared, "I believe that I act today in unison with the Almighty Creator's intention. By fighting the Jews, I battled for the Lord". Hitler was assured that God was the Nazi General delighting in the killing of Jews. To those who dared to question him, his answer was, "Conscience is a Jewish invention."²⁹ He was, in his own words, "Walking with the unfalteringness of a sleep-walker."³⁰

Politics failed to bring peace, as it always does. Religions were called. Noel-Baker wrote: "The World Conference of Religions on Peace (WCRP) have thousands of millions of the faithful who support their temples, their mosques, their churches—Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Shintoists, Jews, Sikhs and others. They held their first conference in Kyoto in 1970. At a second in Belgium in 1974, they called in stentorian tones for the end of war and armaments."³¹ Today interreligious dialogues have been more frequent than ever. In such a meeting held in Berlin in 1986 the message of Shri Ramakrishna stood as the guiding principle to all lovers of peace and God. In 1987, the Kremlin hall was flung open to world celebrities for a global conference on Peace. Shri Ramakrishna's message of the harmony of all creeds and faiths was one of the keynotes of the conference, and this was given in the conference by an invited representative of the Ramakrishna Order.

Saviours with the sword like Mao or Stalin who thought Marxism-Leninism as the panacea for all evils, and anyone thinking not in their strait-jacketed way as enemies of the people, today stand rejected and even fallen. Russia is already destalinised.

Within five years of Breznev's death, in Moscow streets, Russians are enjoying the clownmasks of Breznev.³² Only ten years ago in Peking a huge statue of Mao used to force people's heads down in frightening reverence. Today it has been dynamited to pieces. Mao's mortal remains which were shown to the public as Saviour's memento, are soon going to be burnt into ashes, so that the fallen hero, once a Saviour of an exclusive political faith, "Can sleep peacefully".³³

* * * *

In the historic and first great Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, where the representatives of different religions were extolling the superiority of their own religions, it is Vivekananda who struck the keynote of the Parliament by extolling the harmony of all religions. It was the voice of his Master Shri Ramakrishna, that came out of the lips of his choicest disciple ;

"Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation, and sent whole nations to despair ... Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come."³⁴

This was the central theme of Vivekananda's preaching of Vedanta in the West. He went not to convert, but to preach the message of harmony and to demonstrate that true religion is the manifestation of divinity within, whatever be the path followed. In London he said in an interview that he had come to preach the harmony and unity of all religions.

"All forms of religion have an essential and a non-essential part. If we strip from them the latter, there remains the real basis of all religion,

29. Einstein the Poet ; P. 64.

30. Arnold J. Toynbee, *Acquaintances*, Oxford University Press. 1967, P. 291.

31. P.H.P. August 1975, P. 11.

32. *Time*, April 10, 1989, P. 31.

33. *Time*, April 17, 1989, P. 46.

34. C.W. vol. 1 P. 4.

which all forms of religion possess in common. Unity is behind them all. ...It is on this unity that we need to lay stress, whereas in the West, and indeed everywhere, it is on the non-essential that men are apt to lay stress. They will fight and kill each other for these forms, to make their fellows conform."³⁵

To his Western disciple Nivedita, he said:

"All that I am, all that the world itself will some day be, is owing to my Master, Shri Ramakrishna, who incarnated and experienced and taught this wonderful unity which underlies everything, having discovered it alike in Hinduism, in Islam, and in Christianity."³⁶

To his Indian disciples he categorically said:

"But do you know what the ruling sentiment amongst us is?—non-sectarianism.

35. Ibid. vol. 5. P. 197.

36. Ibid. vol. 5. P. 414.

Our Lord was born to point that out."³⁷

To the disciples of Shri Ramakrishna, his own brother disciples who were destined to carry out this great message of harmony, Vivekananda gave the categorical imperative that they must sacrifice everything for that one sentiment—universality. When finally Shri Ramakrishna Math was established at Belur—on-the-Ganges, he addressed the large assembly who gathered on the holy ground for the ceremony of consecration,

"Pray today all of you, heart and soul, to the holy feet of Shri Ramakrishna, the great Avatara of this cycle that he is, that he may, 'For the welfare of the many, and for the happiness of the many: *vahujanahitaya vahujanasukhaya*', reside in this holy spot from this day for a great length of time, and ever continue to make it the unique centre of harmony amongst all religions."³⁸

37. Ibid. vol. 6. P. 169.

38. Ibid. vol. 7. P. 116.

HARMONY OF RELIGIONS

(INDIA'S UNIQUE RESPONSE TO FOREIGN RELIGIOUS REFUGEES)

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

Coming from the ancient Rig-Veda, getting strengthened through the teachings of Shri Krishna and the *Gita*, the truth and message of the harmony of creeds and religions did not remain merely with our saints and sages. It steadily percolated to and influenced our people, our society, our political thought, and our state policy, both of big empires and smaller states, all over India. That is one of the greatest inheritances of the people of India, of the people belonging to all our creeds and sects—the spirit of harmony, the spirit of understanding and respect for every religion, and the many off-shoots of the same attitude fertilizing inter-group relations. This great

attitude and policy greeted the foreign religions that began to enter India from the first century after Christ onwards. When I said foreign religions, it means only the religions that had their birth outside India, namely, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Bahaism. But, today, all of them have become naturalised here, have become religions of India, and are slowly getting influenced by the Indian environment.

But when they first came into India, with what respect, with what welcome, were they received in our country! That has no parallel else-where.

The first group that came were the Jews, the Israelites. They were received very

kindly, sympathetically, and with respect, by the state of Kerala. To appreciate this, we must keep in mind that they were persecuted everywhere else they went to, after their temple in Jerusalem was shattered by Roman tyranny in 70 A.D. And the group that came to India has been here with us, respected, honoured, and allowed to practise their own culture and religion. It is an outstanding aspect of human history. A religion and a people, which was persecuted all over the world, which was looked down upon by Christian Europe for two thousand years, received respect and reverence only in India. This constitutes an outstanding and unique aspect of world history and shining aspect of Indian history. Similarly came the first Christians in the first century after Christ, to the same Kerala, led by a direct disciple of Jesus according to tradition, St. Thomas, followed by other groups in later centuries. They also received the same welcome. Our country has always been the land of many religions and has always cultivated respect for every religion, in the light of the spiritual vision and philosophy of our culture, namely, unity in diversity. This truth is proclaimed in another famous verse in the Vedas called *Prithivi Suktam*, (Hymn in praise of the earth) *Atharva Veda*, (12.1.45):

*Janam bibharti bahudha vivacasam
nana dharmanam prithivi yathaukasam ;
Sahasram dhara dravinasya me duham
dhruveva dhenuh anapasphuranti—*

‘This earth is one home which holds together, according to their respective attitudes and interests, people speaking different languages, and people following different religions; like an immovable steady cow (while milking), this earth makes us prosperous through thousand streams of wealth and welfare.’

Any one coming to India in the name of God, or any great spiritual teacher, is honoured here. In this context, the most outstanding event that occurred later, in the

ninth century after Christ, was the coming of the Zoroastrians from Iran, the Parsis, as religious and cultural refugees—‘the remnants of the grand Zoroastrian nation’, in the words of Swami Vivekananda’s reference to them in his opening speech at the Chicago World Parliament of Religions on 11 September 1893. It will be educative to study the spirit and method of their reception in India. That story is impressively presented in a book, entitled: *The Parasis*, written by a Parsi scholar, Mrs. Piloo Nanavutty, and published by the National Book Trust, India, New Delhi. I was much impressed when I read that book. It contains a touching narration of the story of the Parsi refugees coming to the western coast of our Gujarat state and what happened to them (pp. 38-40, 1980 edition):

‘Under the Arabs, Iranians were forcibly converted to Islam. Those who clung to their ancient faith were persecuted and fled to the mountains of Kohistan in Khorasan. According to tradition, they stayed there a hundred years. Then they went to the Persian Gulf port of Hormuz where they are said to have remained for fifteen years. From there they set sail ‘in seven junks’, according to the Reverend Henry Lord writing in 1630, and arrived at Diu or Div, an island off the southern extremity of Kathiawar. They stayed there for nineteen years, and then again set sail, this time for Sanjan, a small fishing village on the west coast of Gujarat, where they landed around 785, and where the local Hindu raja, Jadi Rana, or Jadhav Rana, gave them shelter....

‘According to Behman Kaikobad, when the Parsis approached Jadi Rana for permission to settle there, he imposed five conditions on them. These were: the explanation of the Zoroastrian religion to the Raja by the Parsi High Priest who accompanied the refugees and had safeguarded the sacred fire all the way from Iran to India; the adoption of Gujarati as their mother

tongue ; the adoption of the sari by Parsi women ; the surrender of all weapons ; and finally, the Parsi wedding processions to be held in the dark. This last may have been a request from the refugees themselves, a protective measure to avoid the attention of other communities to an alien community in their midst. ...

'A far more vivid account of the meeting between the Persian refugees and Jadhav Rana, than that in the *Kissa*, is given in the Gujarati *Garbas*, group songs and dances, composed by the Parsis and sung by Parsi women on such happy occasions as *Navjotes* and weddings. I give the story in prose which was once sung in verse :

'Jadhav Rana issued a proclamation inviting all citizens to assemble in open maidan (meadow). On a throne covered with rich drapes, the Raja took his seat. He was dressed in royal robes, wore a magnificent turban, and embroidered velvet slippers. Ranged round him were his mounted bodyguards, dressed in white, holding glittering spears.

'At a signal from Jadhav Rana, the Persian refugees were brought into the centre of the assembly. Their frail, old priest, holding a small *Afarghan* with the sacred fire, was the spokesman for the group, through an interpreter.

"What is it you want from us, O strangers from a far land ?", asked Jadhav Rana.

"Freedom of worship, Sire", replied the old priest.

"Granted. What else do you wish ?"

"Freedom to bring up our young in our own traditions and customs."

"Granted. What else do you wish ?"

"A small piece of land that we could cultivate, so that we may not be burden to the people among whom we live."

"Granted. In return, what will you do for the country of your adoption ?"

'The old priest asked for a brass bowl to be filled with milk and brought to the assembly. This was done. He then stirred

a spoonful of sugar in the bowl and, holding it up in his trembling hands, asked :

"Does any man see the sugar in this bowl of milk ?" All shook their heads.

"Sire", said the priest, "We shall try to be like this insignificant amount of sugar in the milk of your human kindness."

'There were murmurs of approval from the crowd. Then, at a signal from the priest, all the refugees—men, women, and the children—prostrated themselves full length on the ground. Each picked up a handful of earth and, with tears streaming down their faces, they pressed it to their eyes and forehead.

'Then, after washing their hands and faces, the refugees turned their faces to the sun and recited the *Kusti* prayers, and performed the *Kusti* ritual.'

How true it has been throughout the history of these twelve hundred years—this silent sweetening, by the Parsis, of the milk of Indian society and culture! When two cultured people meet together, this is what will happen. Have you any parallel to this in any part of the world ?

Today's young generation must understand what is the nature of India's culture, what is the spirit of that culture, what is the wisdom behind that culture. We do not have it today. Our education does not give us any insight into this. That is why we misbehave. We become un-Indian in our attitudes, un-Hindu in our reactions. This we have to understand. In the wake of Buddha and his movement came this wide diffusion of the idea of harmony, of active tolerance, of understanding and acceptance. The same political state in India will support two, three, or more religions, giving respect and honour and support to every one of them.

When the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang came to India in the middle of the seventh century after Christ, he saw this spirit pervading our society. He saw India as a land of great knowledge, nurturing great universities like Nalanda. He himself spent

six years in that famous university. There was another university in Taksasila, or Taxila, in the Peshawar area, a great centre which cultivated especially the medical and surgical sciences. Our land has been devoted to knowledge, devoted to wisdom, devoted to humanistic attitudes. That continued for a few thousand years. But, later on, creativity lagged, stagnation set in, and bad days came. When you live long enough, you will experience some ups and downs in life.

We, as a nation, have lived very long. We have, therefore, experienced many ups and downs—high prosperity followed by adversity; political unity and strength followed by political disunity and fragmentation, inviting foreign invasions in the later centuries. There was no strong political state to resist foreign in-roads. That is an instructive part of our history, especially since 1000 A.D., containing a warning to us of the modern period.

EDUCATION AND SOCIALIZATION OF THE YOUTH IN THE VEDIC PERIOD

(4000 B.C.—1400 B.C.)

DR. ROMA CHAKRABORTY

Education of youth was a prominent feature of Vedic culture. Through the right imparting of education students, both boys and girls, slowly learnt the standard norms and culture of this highly evolved Vedic society which excelled in secular knowledge like arts, sciences, politics, administration, war, and also in spiritual knowledge and spiritual culture.

Socialization continued along with secular and spiritual knowledge during the Vedic period. Social life in all ages throughout the world involves human beings and their interaction. But the pattern of interaction generally varies over space and time. A society which continues to survive generation after generation is bound to interact on the basis of shared values. The future heirs, the children, are taught to believe in the existing social values. The process of acquiring social values is termed as socialization. It is the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and norms of behaviour that enable them to act

as effective members of the society. This is the object of socialization.

Youth is the time in human life when self-consciousness begins to manifest in a higher degree. Young men and women become keenly aware of their status, their problems, and their future. Youth is the period when human instincts and passions begin to assert themselves. If they do not learn how to control these passions they will create both social and individual problems. That is why a proper training to guide children to constructive social work, starts in the family from childhood. An attempt has been made here to describe in short the processes of youths' education and socialization during the Vedic period, mostly through family, teacher's house, society, state, literature, economic life, religion and philosophy which were the major socializing agents. Eminent sages, scholars, poets, philosophers and historians have always proclaimed that the main sources of the advanced stage of socio-political develop-

ment and cultural advancement in India, are the Vedas, namely, the *Rig*, the *Sama*, the *Yajur* and the *Atharva*. These Vedas occupy a significant position in the history of entire mankind. The *Rig Veda* contains hymns in honour of gods. It also reflects the polity (*Dandaniti*) and political thoughts of the then society. The *Sama Veda* narrates the priestly songs. The *Yajur Veda* is the collection of prayers and sacrificial formulae. The *Atharva Veda* consists principally of hymns and formulae on Indian medicine and charms for protecting against evil spirits, prayers for children and domestic occurrences and there are hymns on economic, political and philosophical matters, etc.

Dr. Sarvapelli Radhakrishnan, the philosopher educationist of modern times, writes, "The civilisation which is inspired by the spiritual insight of our sages is marked by a certain moral integrity, a fundamental loyalty, a fine balance of individual desires and social demands and it is these that are responsible for its validity and continuity. To a departure from the ideals can be traced the present weakness and disorder of the Hindu civilisation".¹

The great importance of the Vedic civilisation and culture which flourished around the valley of Indus and its five tributaries, and their applicability for the modern world is confirmed by the scholars like A.L. Basham in his book "*The Wonder that was India*" where he points out, "The sages who meditated in the jungles of the Ganges Valley six hundred years or more before Christ are still forces in the world."²

The Rishis in the Vedic age have shown by their way of life the internal potency of Vedic culture. The Rishis, through estab-

lishing institutions and traditions, had been trying hard to impart education and knowledge to people in order to lead them to all round prosperity and happiness. India, from time immemorial, has unequivocally recognised self-realisation as the supreme goal of life which means the realisation of a life of perfect Existence, perfect Knowledge and perfect Bliss (*Sacchidananda*). So the aim of education in India has always been the attainment of such a fullness of Being (*bhuvan*), for the attainment of spiritual liberation or Immortality (*moksha* or *mukti*).

Although the final goal is the same, India has always taken special pains by providing numerous grades of human beings by recommending different paths for different individuals.

There are various agents through which Vedic polity, political thoughts, learning and culture are transmitted from generation to generation. The agents are: Family; the residence of teachers; the guild of Brahmins or Brahmana Sangha; sacrificial sessions as seats of learning; conferences at Royal Courts as seats of learning; sylvan schools and hermitages; and wandering teachers.

Family:

The first and foremost agency during the Vedic period is naturally the home itself. It is the family where the children learn the religious practices, rituals, traditions of domestic harmony and social service from the parents. The *Mundaka Upanishad* says:

"OM! Brahma, the creator of the universe and the protector of the universe and the protector of the world, was the first among the gods to manifest Himself. To His eldest son Atharva He imparted that knowledge of Brahman that is the basis of all knowledge."³

1. Radhakrishnan, S. *The Cultural Heritage of India*. Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1958, Vol. I, Second Edition, P. XXIII.

2. Basham, A.L. *The Wonder that was India*, Fontana Books in association with Rupa and Co., Calcutta, Third Impression, 1967, P. 489.

3. Gambhirananda Swami (Tr.), *Eight Upanishads*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1958., Vol. II, I.I.I., P. 81.

This gradual process of imparting lessons to children by the father continues. The child who has a mother is instructed adequately by her at the earliest stage of one's childhood, then by a father. Finally the parents send that child to the house of a teacher who instructs him all the possible methods through which one can achieve higher knowledge and gradually to the highest knowledge of Brahman. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* gives evidence to this fact⁴.

Even after his return from the residence of the teacher the father helps him to continue the habits of study.

In spite of transmission of all acquired knowledge of the parents to the children which may not be sufficient in the domain of wider knowledge, there are instances of father and son both going to a teacher to secure the highest wisdom. One such case is of Shvetaketu, son of Gautama and grandson of Aruna, who has miserably failed in giving answers to the questions put by Pravahana (the son of Jivala), the Kshatriya king of Panchalas. This lack of knowledge had enraged Shvetaketu so much that he had to return to his father immediately by turning down the invitation of the king to study there. However, Gautama insisted his son on his going to the king Pravahana to secure the highest wisdom. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* speaks on this episode:

The father said, 'My child, believe me, whatever of the Veda I knew I told you every bit of it. But come, let us go there and live as students.'⁵

The Residence of Teacher:

The most significant centre of advanced learning and culture is the residence of the teacher. This unique centre of education

and training is a vital part of the Vedic community which has continued for several centuries. The progress achieved by the Indians throughout the ages in various fields of life and knowledge is the fruit of the system of education and training at the residence of the teacher. The educational tradition and system founded during the Vedic age can be found even today. The features of the teacher's residential system of education are of great need even for the modern age.

The striking features of the teacher's residence is its community life. A teacher is admitting pupils—boys and girls—to live with him as residents under prescribed disciplines and regulations and they are known as Vratasharish.⁶ He admits students as members of his family and provides for them free board, lodge, medical aids, education and training. The students participate in all the activities of the household. Thus in addition to the intellectual development of the student, his moral and spiritual progresses are also fostered. These pupils come and assemble from different families and obviously the teacher gives every protection, guidance, lessons to every individual according to his merit and capacity. The teacher here functions as the head of the family and as such responsible for the well-being of all inmates of his ashrama. He is also the instructor of socio-religious, and secular and even political knowledge.

After initiation the students are allowed to study the Vedas and this Vedic learning is called *Svadyaya*.⁷ The upanayana ceremony is the prelude to student life known as Brahmacharya. During the Vedic period this sacred ceremony was usually performed at the age of eight in the case of both boys and girls. The whole of the *Shatapatha*

4. Madhavananda Swami, (Tr.), *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1965, Fourth Edition, iv.i.2., P. 570.

5. Ibid., vi. ii. 4., P. 891.

6. Mukherji, Radha Kumud, *Ancient Indian Education*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1960, Third Edition, P. 36.

7. Op. Cit. P. 88, 105.

Brahmana gives a graphic picture of the initiated student's entrance to the preceptor's residential institution. The primary injunctions of the Acharya or the teacher are recorded therein as follows:

"Thou art a Brahmacharin, the teacher says, and thus commits him to the Brahman—Sip water!—water, doubtless, means, ambrosia: sip ambrosia is thus what he tells him,—do thy work!—work, doubtless, means vigour: 'exert vigour' is thus what he tells him,—put on fuel!—enkindle thy mind with fire, with holy lustre, is what he thereby tells him,—do not sleep (do not sleep in the day time)—do not lie, is what he thereby says to him; sip water!—water means ambrosia; 'sip ambrosia' is what he thus tells him. He thus encloses him on both sides with ambrosia (the drink of immortality) and thus the Brahmacharin suffers no harm of any kind, nor does he who know that".⁸

In ancient times, women, too, used to reside in the houses of their teachers after initiation, wear the external signs of studentship and perform the daily prescribed duties. But in course of time, in the case of girls, teaching by outsiders came to be discredited. Their residential student life, as also the imposition of certain hard practices of external austerity in their life, was slowly dropped. Thus the first step of bringing girls away from the healthy external influences of great and good teachers and confining them within their parents' houses, was taken. And still later, this process of confinement was completed when physical confinement came to be accompanied by lack of education and early marriage.

However, the famous passages given by Yama and Harita, the celebrated law-givers show some indications regarding the teaching system of women.

8. Sayanacharya, Shrimat Trayibhashyakar. Saraswati, Sarvavidyanidhana Kavindracharya and Swami Shri Hari—*Shatapatha Brahmana*, Vedantha-prakash Commentary, Part-IV, X-5-4-5, P. 144.

"*Purakalpe Kumarinam maunji—bandhanam ishyate, Adhyapananca Vedanam savitri—vachanantatha. Pita pitrivyo bhrata vanainam Adhyapayet parah; Svagrihe chaiva kanyaya bhaiksha-charya Vidhiyate; Varjayed ajinanchiram jata-dharanam eva cha*".

"In ancient times the tying of the girdle or sacred thread, was prescribed for girls, so also the teaching of the Vedas (to them) and the utterance of the Savitri (Gayatri). (But now) no one should teach them except their fathers, brothers or uncles; the vow of begging should be practised by them only within the limits of their own houses; further, the wearing of deerskins, barks and matted locks should be given up by them"

Another similar passage says:

"*Dvividha striyo brahmavadinayah sadyovadhavashcha. Tatra brahmavadininam upanayanam agnindhanam Vedadhyayanam Svagrihe cha bhiksharyeti. Sadyovadhunam tupasthite vivahe kathamchid—upanayana-matram kritva vivahah karyah*".

"Women are of two types: *brahmavadinis* or those who discourse about Brahman, and *sadyovadhus* or those who are to become brides soon. Of these, the *brahmavadinis* are entitled to initiation, sacrifice to Fire, study of the Vedas and observance of begging alms in their own homes. But the *sadyovadhus* are only initiated before they are married."

While imparting knowledge to the pupil the teacher finds that all pupil cannot grasp them equally and so the knowledge of lower degree is given to the pupil of less merit and knowledge of higher degree is delivered to the students of high calibre.

The students are classified into three grades: *Mahaprajnan*, *Madhyamaprajnan*, and *Alpaprajnan*, i.e. students of high, medium and low ability respectively.⁹

9. Op. Cit., Mukherji, Radha Kumud. P. 26.

The period of studentship is normally fixed at twelve years. For example, in the *Chandogya Upanishad*: Shvetaketu returns home after spending twelve years with his teacher which is confirmed in the following verses:

“Having gone (to the teacher’s house) when twelve years old, he came back when he was twenty-four years old having studied all the Vedas, conceited, arrogant and regarding himself as very learned.”¹⁰

There were probably longer terms of studentship than twelve years. The studentship for thirty-two years and for one hundred and one years is also mentioned. Indra, representative of gods, and Virochana, the sole representative of demons came to Prajapati to seek Atman and lived for thirty two years. Indra then further continued to know Self for one hundred and one years.¹¹

Exery Rishi (seer) evolved certain method as a teacher to teach by oral transmission to his sons/pupils the texts of his imbibed knowledge so as to make it the special property of his family. Every such family of Rishis functions as a Vedic school.¹² In this school for the students who are admitted for specialised lessons, the guide-teacher Rishi is authority. There are three steps of education mentioned in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*—*Shravana*, *Manana*, *Nididhyasana*.

*Atma Va are drashtyavah shrotavyo
mantavyo nididhyasitavya
Maitreyi, atmano Va are darshanena
shravnena matya
vijñanadam sarvam viditam.*

The Self, my dear Maitreyi, should be realised—should be heard of, reflected on and meditated upon. By the realisation of

the Self, my dear through hearing, reflection and meditation, all this is known.¹³

The recitations are done in three different ways: namely *pratinna*, *nirbhujā* and *ubhayamantarena* by taking the words singly, as in Pada Patha, or in pairs, or in the continuous way, as in *Krama Patha*.¹⁴

In the primary stage he coaches his pupils collectively and in the later stage individually in order to impart higher knowledge according to students’ capacity.

Amongst various subjects of Vedic learning the teachers also imparted lessons on polity and political thoughts in accordance with Vedic literature. Along with the polity and the political thoughts in the Vedic period, references of the constituents of different units are found in the *Rig Veda*—the family (*griha* or *kula*), village (*grama*), clan (*jati*), country (*rashtra*).¹⁵

In the Vedas the interpretations of activities of conquest by the gods, their thoughts and other activities are found to be quite close to human affairs. This refers to the fundamental question of the origin of kingship or monarchy. In the literature of the *Aitareya Brahmana* there is a mention on polity and a question has been put how a king rules over so many.¹⁶

In *Aitareya Brahmana* we find that monarchy was the most powerful form of government in ancient India. The monarch

13. Op. Cit. *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, ii. iv. 5., P. 356.

14. Op. Cit., Mukherji, Radha Kumud, P. 27.

15. Apte, V.M. *Political and Legal Institutions*, In Majumdar, R.C. (ed). *The History and Culture of the Indian people. The Vedic Age*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1965., Vol. I, Fourth Impression, P. 326.

16. Samasrami Pandit Satyavrata (ed.), *The Aitareya Brahmana of the Rig Veda*, Satya Press, Calcutta. 1895, Vol. I, P. 107-108., also Berrledala Keith (Tr.), *Rig Veda Brahmanas: The Aitareya and Kausitaki Brahmanas of the Rig-Veda*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1920., First Indian Reprint, P. 117.

10. Swahananda Swami (Tr.), *The Chandogya Upanishad*, Shri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1956, First Edition, vi. 1.2., P. 411.

11. Ibid., viii-7-3., P. 588 and viii-ii-3., P. 606.

12. Op. Cit., Mukherji, Radha Kumud, P. 25.

may be elected or hereditary. But in the Vedic period the process of monarchy is mainly elective. He is the supreme head of all administrative, political and legal machineries. The essence of kingship always lay in righteousness (*dharma*).¹⁷ The king himself was sometimes above punishment. Even then there are assemblies (*sabha* and *samiti*) which function as watchguards of the autocratic tendency of the king.¹⁸ These popular bodies keep popular control in the affairs of the states.

Even after teaching the political thoughts the teacher's anxiety for establishing a tradition through a succession of able students, is revealed in the Vedas. The student as a *brahmachari* was expected to dedicate his entire life not only for the period of formal studentship for gaining knowledge, leading an enlightened life, and spread of knowledge, but also for finally reaching the highest spiritual goal.

The relation between the teacher and the taught was rooted in their common aspirations. Both of them are partners in the sacred pursuit of truths. The truths are based on Brahman as the basis of the universe, immortal, all-knowing, and the eternal ruler.¹⁹ Teaching was mostly studying with one's pupils. The ancient Rishis rightly described it as a joint endeavour. The two must have full confidence in each other.

Acharyah purvarupam

Antevasyuttararupam

Vidya sandhih

Pravacanam sandhanam

Ityadhividyam.

—The teacher is the first letter. The student is the last letter. Knowledge is the

assignation. Instruction is the link. This is the meditation with regard to knowledge.²⁰

There are some duties which would be performed by students.

Trayo dharmaskandha yajnoadhyanamiti prathamastapa eva dvitiyo Brahmacharya-charya kulavasi tritioatyantamatma-nama-charyakula avasadayam sarva (etc.) punya-shloka bhavanti. Brahmasamstho amritatva-meti.

—Three are the branches of religious duty: Sacrifice, study and gifts—these are the first. Austerity alone is the second, and the celibate student of sacred knowledge, who lives in the house of the teacher throughout his life mortifying his body in the teacher's house, is the third. All these become possessors of meritorious worlds; but he who is established firmly in Brahman, attains immortality.²¹

In order to overcome the impediments to the acquisition of knowledge and for averting the obstacles to the acquisition of knowledge of Brahman, the teacher and the taught recite the following invocation:

Om sahanavavatu sahanaubhunaktu saha viryam karavavahai,

Tejasvinavadhita mastu ma vidvishavahai.

Om shantih, shantih, shantih.

—May he protect us (teacher and the taught) both together. May he nourish us both together. May we both acquire strength together. Let our study be brilliant. May we not cavil at each other. Om! Peace! Peace! Peace!²²

On the completion of his academic career the student used to place the last fuel in the

17. Op. Cit. *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, i. iv. 14., P. 178.

18. Op. Cit. Apte, V.M. P. 429.

19. Tyagisananda, Swami, *Shvetashvataropani-shad*, Shri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1943, Second Edition, vi. 17., P. 129.

20. Gambhirananda, Swami (Tr.), *Eight Upanishads*, Vol. I, *Taittiriya Upanishad*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1957., i. iii. 2.3. Pp. 244-45.

21. Op. Cit. *The Chandogya Upanishad*, ii. 23.1, Pp. 155-56.

22. Op. Cit. *The Taittiriya Upanishad*, ii. 1., P. 295.

fire and took his final bath. After his bath he was called a *snataka* or graduate. Thereafter he returned to his own home from the teacher's residential institutions.

A student after studying the Vedas, must not leave his preceptor's house without inquiring into the scriptural duties. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* has a whole chapter dealing with education, the relation between the teachers and the taught and the final instructions given to the students during their convocation after graduation. These instructions are described below:

"Having taught the Vedas, the preceptor imparts this post-instruction to the students: Speak the truth. Practise righteousness. Make no mistake about study. Having offered the desirable wealth to the teacher, do not cut off the line of progeny. There should be no inadvertence about truth. There should be no deviation from righteous activity. There should be no error about protection of yourself. Do not neglect propitious activities. Do not be careless about learning and teaching."²³

The pupils on completion of their respective studies at their teachers' residence paid their respectful homage by bowing down to them and offering prayers for blessings from the teachers.

After the completion of the studies in the teacher's house the pupils return to their respective homes. This coming back of the students to their parental homes was known as *samavartana*.²⁴ Then they got absorbed in different fields of work, in accordance with their capability, while many of them devoted their lives for further learnings through other agencies.

23. Op. Cit. *The Taittiriya Upanishad*, i. xi. 1., Pp. 276-77.

24. Op. Cit. *The Chandogya Upanishad*., 4-10-1, Pp. 294-95.

Brahmana—Sanghas:

The Brahmana-Sanghas²⁵ are the assemblies or academies where brilliant students joined for the higher levels of education. These learned men met in conferences to discuss, to formulate and finally to put into proper shape both the language and philosophy of the Vedas. These scholars continued to discuss and give their respective contributions for the advancement of knowledge. The methods for the promotion and diffusion of learning through seminars and conferences were first evolved in India.²⁶ The assemblies or academies of these scholars have functioned as agencies of Vedic learning.

Sacrificial sessions as seats of Learning:

The name of one of the most important places of sacrificial sessions is Naimisha forest where the Rishis, the scholars and the learned persons with wisdom used to frequently meet to discuss and debate on various subjects. Through such discussions the Vedic thoughts were preserved and transmitted. These sorts of sacrificial festivals lasted for one day or several days which might even continue for hundred days or even for several years.

Janaka, the king of Videha declared a special prize in a horse sacrifice session—thousand cows—to the person who was best-read, most learned and the wisest.

Conferences at Royal Courts as Seats of Learning:

In ancient time conferences of learned persons were held at different places which were organised for the spread of culture and knowledge. Besides the *parishads* or academies at different places, the king occasionally summoned a gathering or congress in which

25. Op. Cit. Mukherji, Radha Kumud, P. 37.

26. Ibid., P. 37.

the representative thinkers of the country of various schools of thoughts were invited to discuss and exchange their views.

There was a centre of learning in the court of Ajatashatru, the king of Kashi, whose name was associated with the famous but proud scholar Balaki Gargya. Again the court of king Pravahana was another cultural centre which attracted famous scholars like Svetaketu Aruneya, Shilaka Shalavatya and Chaikitayana Dalbhya. There was yet another cultural centre, the court of king Ashvapati Kaikeya where famous scholars like Uddalaka, Prachinashala, Satyayajna, Indradyumna, Jana and Budila were invited.

The contributions made by these scholars for the advancement of Vedic knowledge on various aspects of life are immense.

Sylvan Schools and Hermitages:

The Sylvan Schools and the Hermitages also played vital roles in propagating higher spiritual thoughts and Vedic culture. The references of these types of schools are found in the Aranyakas. The word 'aranyaka' meant "that which is read in the forest."

Brahmodya:

There was also another socializing agent for the spread of education which is known as *Brahmodya*. This agent transmitted knowledge on theological subjects through discussions at the *Ashvamedha* sacrifice and at the *Dasharatra*, ten-day festival.

Wandering Teachers:

Another useful agent for the spread and transmission of Vedic learning and culture

were the wandering teachers (*Charakas*).²⁷ Though they were not authoritative like teachers, they were also the educators of thought. The wandering teachers went through the country for the spread of culture. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, there is reference to the wandering scholars who were known as *Charakas*.²⁸

The Vedas written by our Aryan forefathers, are most sacred books revered by Indians and equally by many non-Indians. These books have been called the 'Bibles of Mankind'. The outcome of the transmission of learning and culture during the Vedic period is that every individual should be endowed with privileges to develop more and more towards being unique, dynamic, and conscious of the truths of life for self-realisation.

The clarion calls of the Vedas are given to men to cast aside and trample their lower nature in order to rise to the full height of the Divine which is inherent in every person. The *Katha Upanishad* says:

*Uttishtrata, Jagrata
Prapya varan nibodhata
Kshurasya dhara nishita duratyaya
Durgam pathastat kavayo vadanti.*

—Arise, awake and learn by approaching the excellent ones. The wise ones describe that path to be as inaccessible as a razor's edge, which when sharpened, is difficult to tread on.²⁹

27. Op. Cit. Mukherji, Radha Kumud, Pp. 117-150.

28. Op. Cit. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, III. iii, I, Pp. 459-60.

29. Gambhirananda, Swami, *Eight Upanishads*, *Katha Upanishad*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1957. I. iii-14., P. 171.

NARAYAN SHASTRI

(THE NOT-SO-WELL-KNOWN SANNYASI-DISCIPLE OF SHRI RAMAKRISHNA)

SWAMI EKATMANANDA

“There are pundits who speak words of wisdom. But they merely talk, they do not live up to them...If I hear that pundits are practising discrimination and dispassion, then I fear them. Otherwise, I look upon them as mere goats and dogs...¹ What will avail a man to have mere scholarship? A pundit may have studied many scriptures, he may recite many sacred texts, but if he is still attached to the world and if inwardly he loves ‘Woman’ and ‘Gold’ then he has not assimilated the contents of the scriptures. For such a man the study of scriptures is futile... The pundits talk big but where is their mind fixed? On ‘Woman’ and ‘Gold’, on creature comforts and money. The vulture soars very high in the sky, but its eyes are fixed on the charnel-pit. It is continually looking for charnel-pits, carcasses, and dead bodies....² However, Narayan Shastri was not merely a scholar. He practised *sadhana* as well. He studied for twenty-five years at a stretch. *Nyaya* alone he studied for seven years. Still he would go into ecstasy while repeating the name of Shiva. The King of Jaipur wanted to make him his Court Pundit, but Narayan refused.”^{3a}

The foregoing are the words of Shri Ramakrishna. Now who was this Narayan Shastri whom Shri Ramakrishna loved and admired? Very little of his biography is available at this distant time, although Shri Ramakrishna himself states in the course of his conversation with the devotees two or three important events of Shastri’s

life. A serious endeavour to gather the facts of Shastri’s life has resulted in obtaining just scrappy additional information.^{3b}

Narayan Shastri belonged to an orthodox brahmin family of a village in the Shekhawat region of Rajasthan⁴ residing somewhere near Jaipur, and was born about the year 1830. It would appear that he started his study of the scripture at the age of fifteen in Rajasthan itself and continued it later for eighteen years at a stretch till he was 33 years old, at Varanasi etc. Sometime during this period he got married. Then he went to Nadia (Navadwip) in Bengal for a special study of Neo Indian Logic (*Navya-Nyaya*). On the way he halted at Dakshineswar in Calcutta (1863), having heard about the magnificent temple of the Divine Mother Bhavatarini Kali and its young priest in divine inebriation, Shri Ramakrishna. At that time, seeing Shri Ramakrishna and his apparent madness, Narayan Shastri perceived him to have taken leave of his senses. “Narayan Shastri came here and saw me

1. *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*: April-5, 1884.

2. *Ibid*: March-11, 1885.

3a *Ibid.*, July-3, 1884.

3(b). Curiously enough the name of the eminent Sanskrit grammarian from whom Swami Vivekananda as a pupil learnt a portion of the *Mahabhashya* (Patanjali’s great commentary) on the Sutras of Panini during the latter’s stay at Khetri palace, was also Narayan (das) Shastri. He too hailed from Rajasthan and was born in 1845 and died in 1924. Could the two Narayan Shastris be identical by any chance? Apparently the answer will be a definite ‘No’. But then its possibility cannot be totally ruled out because of several similarities in their lives. Perhaps, the present writer who is making every effort to collect more authentic particulars of both the personalities may in due course come out with a detailed essay in order to clear this doubt.

4. *Smriti Katha*, Akhandananda, P. 105.

like 'super-sensuous perception' and 'samadhi' were unclear. And now he saw a man in whose life such truths were experienced facts repeatedly demonstrated before his very eyes. He said to himself, "How wonderful! Where can I find a better teacher to explain the truths of the scriptures? I must not lose this golden opportunity. Nothing is so certain as death. I must make a serious attempt to realise the Lord and be free." Every day this thought gnawed him and filled him with dispassion to the world.

Days passed by when one day the Master, accompanied by Shastri, went to Jadu Mallick's garden-house, invited by the aunt of Jadu Mallick, on the occasion of the *Bhagavata-saptaha* (reading of the Bhagavata from beginning to end in seven days), a religious ceremony which is also known as *Parayani Patha*. It was the last and seventh day. When the *Patha* was almost over, Shastri raised a controversy on a certain passage. The reciter or reader was Nava-dwipa Goswami of Beniatola. The two got involved in prolonged heated argument. At this juncture Shri Ramakrishna interrupted Shastri and squashed his argumentative fire born of intellectual egoism by saying that during the fight between Arjuna, the devotee, and Bhishma, the Jnani (man of wisdom), Bhagavan Shri Krishna advised the former only to give up.⁸

One more incident knocked off Shastri's pride of learning: Occasionally some Sikh sepoy stationed at the magazine adjacent to the northern wall of the Kali Temple Estate administered by the then governing (East India) Company, would meet Shri Ramakrishna and listen to his words of spiritual upliftment. One day the Master took Narayan Shastri with him to the sepoy when the latter, unsolicited, started sermonizing. Vexed, the devout Sikhs refused to

hear him saying that he was a man of the world and not of its renunciation.⁹

Humbled thus, Shastri sat at the feet of Shri Ramakrishna with a rare spirit of humility and tried to assimilate his words of wisdom. He would say to himself, "Ah! He has realised the goal of life, and armed with that direct knowledge, how calm he is! The Upanishads declare that whatever such persons wish, come to pass without fail; and those who take refuge with them reach soon the end of their earthly desires and attain spiritual illumination. Why should I not, therefore, make him the pole-star of my life?" Days and months rolled on to years, may be six or seven, whilst he was gathering courage to beg the Master to become his Guru.

Keeping in mind such incidents in the conduct of Shastri, Shri Ramakrishna said while talking with pundit Shashadhar, a follower of the path of knowledge (Jnana), "That is why Narayan Shastri used to say, 'The harmful effect of the study of the scriptures is that it encourages reasoning and arguing'.¹⁰

"Once (perhaps in 1872), Michael (Michael Madhusudan Dutt, a lawyer, and one of the greatest Bengali poets, who was a convert to Christianity) visited the Temple garden when Narayan Shastri was living with me. Dwarika Babu, Mathur's eldest son, brought him here. The owners of the Temple garden were about to get into a law-suit with the English proprietors of the adjoining powder magazine; so they wanted Michael's advice. I met him in the big room next to the manager's office. Narayan Shastri was with me. I asked Narayan to talk to him. Michael couldn't talk very well in Sanskrit. He made mistakes. Then they talked in Bengali. Narayan Shastri asked him his reason for giving up the Hindu religion.

9. Ibid., P. 3, 9, 208.

8. *Shri Shri Ramakrishna Punthi*: P. 2, 9, 204-205.

10. *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*: June-30, 1884.

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10. *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*: June-30, 1884.

8. *Shri Shri Ramakrishna Punthi*: P. 2, 9, 204-205.

Pointing to his stomach, Michael said, 'It is for this.' Narayan Shastri said, 'What shall I say to a man who gives up his religion for his belly's sake?' Thereupon Michael asked me to say something. I said, 'I don't know why, but I don't feel like saying anything. Someone seems to be pressing my tongue.'¹¹

In this connection Gurudas Burman has written: "Michael earnestly requested Narayan Shastri to visit his house, only to be replied, 'I don't go to anyone's house, and I do not expect anything from anybody'.¹²

"Hriday and some others say that that mood of the Master left him a little afterwards and he moved Madhusudan's mind by singing in his sweet voice a few songs¹³ of Ramprasad, Kamalakanta and other eminent sadhakas, and taught him thereby that devotion to God was the essential thing in the world."¹⁴ Swami Saradananda wrote, "Subsequently, disgusted with the thought of Michael's playing the renegade, Narayan Shastri wrote with a piece of charcoal in big Bengali letters on the wall¹⁵ of the verandah to the east of the door leading to the Master's room that to give up one's religion under the stress of one's monetary

needs is a very mean act. Shastriji's written opinion on this matter attracted our notice and we were curious to know all about it. On enquiry we learnt everything. Since Shastriji had lived in Bengal for a long period, he knew Bengali very well."¹⁶

Sometime early in 1875 an important event took place in the life of Shri Ramakrishna, which was destined to produce far-reaching results. It was his first meeting with the celebrated Brahmo leader and preacher Keshav Chandra Sen who was at that time staying with some of his followers in the garden-house of Jayagopal Sen at Belgharia, about three and a half kilometres from Dakshineswar. "Before meeting Keshav, I asked Narayan Shastri to visit him and tell me what he thought of him. Narayan subsequently reported Keshav was an adept in *japa*. Knowing Astrology, he remarked that Keshav has been born under a good star. Then only I went to visit Keshav in the garden-house at Belgharia."¹⁷

Then (about 1876-77) came the last known fact in Shastri's life. One day he happened to meet the Master in a secluded place and took that opportunity to express the desire of his heart to be initiated into

11. Ibid., July-3, 1884.

12. *Shri Ramakrishna Charit*, Part I, P. 111.

13. Gurudas Burman has said that among the songs, two were worth mentioning: "Balo dekhi bhai ki have mole" and "Sakali tomar Iccha Icchamayi Tara tumi." (*Shri Ramakrishna Upadesha under Dharma upalabdhir vastu ; Shri Ramakrishna Charit*, Part-I, P. 111).

14. *Shri Ramakrishna—the Great Master*: Vol. II, P. 629.

15. Swami Brahmananda says: "Once a Brahmachari with matted hair, by name Ramachandra, came to Dakshineswar to have darshan of the Master. Without telling anything else, he went on repeating 'Shivoham', 'Shivoham', meaning 'I am one with God'. Shri Ramakrishna remained silent for some time and then said, 'What will it avail by merely repeating 'Shivoham', 'Shivoham'? That sacred syllable merits chanting only when Sacchidananda Shiva (the Blissful Lord) is meditated upon in the heart and absolute

identity of one with Him is experienced directly and immediately. Without it, just uttering 'Shivoham' is of what use? Until then it is desirable to maintain the attitude of 'Master and servant'. Listening to such and other spiritual counsels of Shri Ramakrishna, the Brahmachari realised their true import and perceived his self-delusion. Before leaving, he left the following writing on the wall: 'Through the words of Shri Ramakrishna, Ramachandra Brahmachari has adopted from today the sadhana of 'Master and servant'." But Swami Saradananda nowhere in his *Shri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* mentions this incident. Does it mean that the two are entirely different and the two authors did not know both of them? Or, had there been an unwitting mix-up?

16. *Shri Ramakrishna—the Great Master*: Vol. II, P. 629.

17. *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*: July-3, 1884.

sannyasa, and pressed his request tenaciously.¹⁸

According to Gurudas Burman, "He (Narayan Shastri) became very restless to receive spiritual initiation from Shri Ramakrishna. But the Master said that he never gave *mantra* to anybody. However, Shastri's eagerness and determination further sharpened and he would not leave his chosen Guru without obtaining it. So Shri Ramakrishna asked him to go to the Kali Temple and have Her darshan. Shastri replied, 'When a living Kali is here, I shall not go to see the stone image of Kali'. Indeed, Shri Ramakrishna was verily his living Kali.

"A few days afterwards, on the lunar eclipse, as Shastri lay prostrate on the river bank overtaken by grief, Shri Ramakrishna happened to come there. Suddenly Shastri caught hold of his feet and sobbed saying, 'My Lord, pray bless me with a *mantra*, do please give me initiation; I shall not leave you.' The Master whispered to him, 'Repeat this Kali mantra, that will be enough.' Narayan implicitly followed the sacred instruction, and later renounced the world. While leaving he told Shri Ramakrishna, 'Should I realise Truth, I shall return, else not.'"¹⁹

Indeed Narayan Shastri developed a spirit of intense renunciation and, giving up his wife, went away. He often spoke about his great wish to practise tapasya at the Vashistha-Ashrama and pleaded, 'Who knows when I shall die?'²⁰ Shri Ramakrishna yielded to his importunities and initiated him into *sannyasa*. But no one has ever known his *sannyasa* name if he had it.

True, Shri Ramakrishna himself has not explicitly stated that he gave Narayan Shastri *sannyasa*. But then, did he ever tell

anybody that he gave initiation to anyone? Never, to our knowledge. Obviously, the author of *Shri Ramakrishna—the Great Master*, knew what he wrote.

After that event, Shastri feelingly bid goodbye to Dakshineswar. Nothing certain was known about him later except that he spent his days ever after at that Ashrama, undergoing severe austerities in order to achieve his goal.²¹

However, from Swami Akhandananda who went to Malsisir in Rajasthan in 1893-1894 during his peregrination around Khetri, we learn: "At Malsisir near Khetri, I heard from pundit Sitaram Shastri that the great devotee of Thakur, and famous logician pundit Narayan Shastri first preached Shri Ramakrishna as an *Avatara* in those parts many years before."²² Evidently, soon after taking final leave of Shri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, Narayan Shastri went back home to settle his family matters, and remained in Rajasthan for a few years, in the course of which he propagated the *Avatara-hood* of the Master during the very lifetime of the latter. Emphatically, therefore, to Narayan Shastri, perhaps the earliest *sannyasi-disciple* of the Great Master, belongs the everlasting credit of proclaiming first outside Bengal the Divine Incarnation of Shri Ramakrishna.

Although neither *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna* nor *Shri Ramakrishna—the Great Master* tells the location of the Vashistha-Ashrama, it has been reliably ascertained that the Ashrama of Narayan Shastri is situated in the Kamrup-Kamakhyā region of Assam. More precisely, it stands some eleven kilometres away from Guwahati, the present capital of Assam State, on the way to Shillong. It had nice scenic beauty and sanctity in the olden days but lost it all after opening of the Brahmaputra

18. *Shri Ramakrishna—The Great Master*: Vol. II, P. 629.

19. *Shri Ramakrishna Charit*: Part-I, P. 111-112.

20. *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*: July-3, 1884.

21. *Shri Ramakrishna—The Great Master*: Vol. II, P. 630.

22. *Smriti Katha*: Akhandananda, P. 105.

Bridge. People from distant villages picnic at that place. Just about a kilometre away is a big Army Hospital. In those days the whole area was a thick jungle with wild animals, and the atmosphere of the Vashistha-Ashrama was tranquil and elevating. A clear-water spring, known as 'Arundhati' from the surrounding hills, flows down by the Temple on the rocky soil. Indeed, the Ashrama was picturesque and an ideal spot for serious spiritual exercises. Within the Temple are three streams of 'Arundhati' called Sandhya, Lalita and Kanta. It is also said that another by name Saraswati exists but hidden underneath. The priest of the Temple nowadays shows the visitor the spot of Vashistha Muni (Rishi) inside its premises. The whole set-up at the foot of the Khasi and Jaintia hills, now named Meghalaya, is even at present uplifting.

Vashistha-Ashrama: The Legend has it that the great sage Vashistha Muni (Rishi), Guru of King Dasharatha's son Shri Rama, came at the later part of his life to the place some eleven kilometres southeast of Guwahati which was in the ancient days known as Pragjyotishpur, ruled by King Bhagadatta of the Mahabharata times. The Muni was so very charmed with the natural beauty and serenity of the spot that he made a hermitage there and settled down. He installed a Shiva-linga for daily worship and meditation, and finally attained Mahasamadhi there itself. Hence the place came to be called Vashistha-Ashrama. It is said that on that very spot of Vashistha's Nirvana the then Ruler of Ahom, Rajeshwar Singh Deo, got erected a Shiva Temple about 225 years ago. He also donated in the name of the Temple and the Ashrama some landed properties yielding good revenue for the daily worship and management of the establishment. Also, a few learned Brahmins as priests and some others to serve there were

appointed. Thus the smooth running of the entire institution has been carried on hereditarily.

A committee, formed about twenty years ago, of the pujaris and sebaits of the Temple with the Deputy Commissioner of the Kamrup district as its President run the administration. Again, some years back, a devotee got built at the Vashistha-Ashrama, with the approval of the committee, a beautiful Temple of Shri Lakshmi Devi (the Goddess of Auspiciousness and Wealth) called Lakshmi Mandir, a little away from the main Temple. Pilgrims from far and near, besides tourists, visit the Vashistha-Ashrama everyday. Buses and taxis regularly ply between Guwahati and the Ashrama. In the two Tantric texts, the *Rudra Zamal* and *Brahma Zamal*, Vashistha-Ashrama is mentioned, but unfortunately they are not available now.

Narayan Shastri: From an old pujari of the Vashistha-Ashrama Temple, aged nearly eighty-five years, it was recently learnt that when he was a boy of 12-14 year of age, he had seen quite often at the Vashistha-Ashrama a sadhu who was known as Narayan Babaji—tall, fair and venerable in appearance with a long white beard. Also that the Babaji talked with the visitors in Assamese, and had a couple of resident *chelas* (disciples) to look after his comforts. Furthermore, the octogenarian retired priest says that Narayan Babaji spent most of his time in meditation, and occasionally discoursed to the devotees, living in a small hut built within the premises of the Ashrama area. This tiny structure was shifted some years back without walls to another spot near the confluence of the three aforesaid streams by the Temple. It is now-a-days used as resting place for visiting pilgrims. The residents of the Temple even today show it as one-time residence of Narayan Babaji.

SEWA RURAL : A STORY OF INSPIRED DEDICATION

BY A REPRESENTATIVE OF PRABUDDHA BHARATA

It was a day of days in 1985 when a quiet Indian lady doctor, a pediatrician, stood up at the World Health Association in Geneva, to receive the Sasakawa Health Award for the first time from India. It is an award which is considered a Nobel-prize in Health. The award which carries a beautiful memento and an award of a hundred thousand dollars, was instituted by the World Health Organisation (WHO), with a huge endowment offered by the Japanese ship-building magnate Mr. Sasakawa. The lady doctor received it on behalf of her organisation SEWA-RURAL which had done pioneering work for health in a semi-desert rural area of Gujarat since 1980.

The story of this glorious day is a story of just a few souls inspired by the life and message of Shri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. A couple, both medical surgeons, and another couple, both experts in management, shifted in 1970s from India to the West in search of better experience and prospects. Within a few years just when they were going to be established in a comfortable life in America, they heard the call of the prophet Vivekananda to serve the poor of their own country, India. Already, before leaving India, they came in contact with Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideas through the Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order, one of whom they accepted as their Teacher (Guru). In the West, the inspiring words of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda were very much in their mind. Then suddenly one day came a call from within—the call to serve their countrymen in the remote villages of Gujarat where they came from. The impact of Gandhi, his austerity, sacrifice and dedication for his countrymen, which is, by the large, powerful in Gujarat, Gandhi's native place, were

always in their veins. Now the fire of Vivekananda inflamed that spirit of dedication and service.

Without a second thought about an unforeseen future, in 1980 the four people just landed in an arid, semi-desert area of Bharuch District in Gujarat. The place was a remote semi-town and half-village, Jhagaria. Under a tin shade, the four souls gathered. In front of them lay a vast area, where infant-mortality, malnutrition, and economic backwardness had been stalking like a black colossus since centuries. The two surgeons, husband and wife, at once took medical help to the people by buying medicine with their own pennies. The management-couple started gathering help in various ways, through friends and well-wishers, financiers, and above all, by bringing a public awareness. A few more dedicated people flocked around. All combined and formed a trust to serve the rural people of the areas in all possible ways. The trust was known as SEWA-RURAL. The word SEWA was coined as a combination of four major ideas ; S(Society for), E(education), W(welfare) and A (action). Since this service was totally dedicated for backward village people, the word RURAL was added to it.

Right from the beginning the pioneers of the project foresaw that they would have to fight against a few major problems, ignorance and illiteracy, economic backwardness and ill-health combined with a high rate of infant-mortality.

The solutions to these problems were sought in the lines of Vivekananda and Gandhi, especially along the lines of Vivekananda's man-making and character-building education and the idea of alleviating the socio-economic conditions of the masses

through agro-economic development with appropriate technology and Primary Health Care facilities.

The region is predominantly agricultural where 60% of the people are landless labourers and 70% females and 40% males are illiterate.

Health was the initial activity of SEWA-RURAL since most of the group members were doctors. The first step was the establishment of a general hospital having all the routine diagnostic and treatment facilities, including surgery. Over the years this has grown into a 65 bedded hospital having full-time consultants in surgery, paediatrics, and ophthalmology, in addition to general services. In addition, a number of specialists in other fields, visits the hospital regularly. With provisions for essential but advanced medical technology, the hospital is being updated frequently. For instance, it now offers investigations like ultrasonography and microsurgical skills (at present restricted to eye surgery).

A remarkable feature of this hospital is that most of its nursing and supportive staff are from the local tribal community. Picked up as barely literate boys and girls from poor families, they are given intensive task-oriented training, tested, and finally absorbed. Doctors at the hospital believe that nursing care is more reliable here than at many centres having formally qualified nurses. At present the hospital is almost self sufficient in nursing, laboratory and other technical supportive staff.

The following will give an idea of the hospital's performance so far (October 1980 to March 1989).

Outdoor patients	2,00,000
Indoor patients	97,000
Consultations	94,288
Laboratory Tests	2,32,316
X-Ray/Screening	19,986
Deliveries	2,143

Operations	5,712
Eye Operations	716
TB Patients	3,076

In recognition of this, the hospital was given a national award for the best non-government rural hospital for the year 1989 by Bombay Management Association and Bajaj group of Industries.

Curative services went a long way in building necessary rapport with the community and establishing the credibility of the group. However, the curative care is not all. The group recognised as unfortunate the situation that exists in health, where health has become a monopoly of the medical profession. Ill-health of the people, often due to circumstances beyond their own control, is exploited by a few. Health is a fundamental right of the people and therefore knowledge about health and disease in a form that they can comprehend and utilise should be equally a right of the people. It follows that health care involves increasing awareness in people about their own health and health problems and demystifying to whatever extent possible the processes of ill-health and their solutions. This is a corner-stone in the concept of Primary Health Care.

With all this being considered, a baseline survey was conducted in May 1982. In October of the same year a comprehensive Community Health Project (CHP) was launched in 10 villages which has now expanded to around 40 villages with a total population of approximately 45,000. This project consists of 3 levels of services. At the periphery are the village level workers who care for minor ailments and give preventive and promotive services. The middle level including a mobile dispensary mainly provides technical support and supervision. At the centre are the hospital, the training and monitoring facilities. Through this system an effort is made to deliver essential

components of health focussing particularly on maternal and child health, nutrition, and infectious diseases. The emphasis, as always, is on educating people about their own health.

There are several innovative features in the delivery system at SEWA-RURAL. It was for the first time that the Government handed over the entire health care responsibility of a cluster of villages to a Voluntary Organisation. This ensures better utilisation of public funds. Avoiding duplication this system also decreases confusion that would otherwise arise out of workers from both the government and the voluntary organisations working in the same area.

An important component of SEWA-RURAL's health delivery system consists of strong referral support to its peripheral services. This enhances credibility by increasing accessibility to higher levels of care and helps keeping a close tag on patterns of ill-health in the community.

It was long realised that much of maternal and child morbidity, and mortality is associated with child bearing. SEWA-RURAL's contributions to this have been the development of a delivery pack and training of Traditional Birth Attendants to conduct safe deliveries utilising this pack.

Apart from these major innovations the organisation has developed a culture of maintaining academic and professional linkages with medical and non-medical individuals and institutions. This helps immensely in introducing new ideas and maintaining a refreshing atmosphere.

It is in recognition of such innovative approaches in contributing to rural health, that the WHO bestowed the first Sasakawa health award upon SEWA-RURAL for the year 1985.

Some figures of ongoing inservice data

would give some idea of impact of these services at the community level.

	Base Line (1981-82)	Present (1987-88)
Infant Mortality Rate	164	67
Couple Protection Rate	37%	65%
Antenatal Care	50%	75%
Delivered by trained personnel	25%	85%
Immunization coverage:		
BCG	33%	93%
Measles	—	76%
Polio	9%	77%
DPT/DT	7%	76%
Vit. A Coverage	70%	87%
Malnutrition status (Grade III, IV)	15%	3%

However, health cannot be viewed in isolation. Thus, while the beginning was with health, the need of the hour was to integrate this vital socio-economic development of the community. A beginning has been made in educational and economic activities like *papad* making, tutorial classes for students, a technical training centre for rural and tribal youth, social forestry, a credit society for women etc. Self-reliance and involvement of youth and women are the main criteria for these activities.

They had all been started over the last four years and had had their ups and downs. In order to formalise and intensify the process of learning from experiences and reapplication of this knowledge, a research wing has now been added, which at present is to deal with Community Health issues. For its activities, SEWA-RURAL procures the necessary funds from various sources—the government, other funding agencies and individual donors. Since its inception, a sum of more than Rs. 2 crores has been spent on various activities. A common string that runs through all programmes of SEWA-RURAL is a conscious effort to be sensitive

to feedback from every level of workers and the people and a willingness to change. This helps develop a feeling of participation and closeness among the staff, which raises the level of enthusiasm and efficiency in work. It also contributes to development of leadership qualities among larger number of staff. In fact, the organisation believe that individual's development must accompany the development of the organisation. Only in this way can a genuine attempt be made to attain the goal.

Underlying all activities of SEWA-RURAL are three basic principles: Social Service, Scientific Approach, and Spiritual Outlook.

With these principles and the programmes outlined above, much has been achieved over these years. However the organisation is well aware of its shortcomings and of what it must achieve. People in SEWA-RURAL believe that as elsewhere the vital link between ideas and the results thereof is programme implementation. This is a challenging task. From its experiences, the group has learnt that for effective implementation an effective way is needed. It has therefore emphasised mobilisation, motivation and participation of workers in both the service activities and the community. The ultimate answer as to the success or otherwise of this approach will be provided by the change in patterns of health and social behaviour of the people and by the extent of their self-reliance.

On a quiet February afternoon when the representative of *Prabuddha Bharata*, went to visit the organisation, he just entered into a quiet semi-village area, where the headquarters of SEWA-RURAL is situated. It was a small compound with a 65 bedded hospital, doctors' and nurses' quarters, office building, a simple meeting hall and a prayer room. In the morning outdoor patients come in large numbers from the distant villages around. The hospital is training and accommodating nurses from tribal women. Com-

puters have been introduced and latest techniques like ultra-ocular implantations are also being done. The charge is extremely moderate, and most patients are treated free. Outpatients Departments are heavily crowded with people flocking round for all kinds of treatments to this only oasis of life. The technical school of the SEWA-RURAL is a little away from the main office, where the poorest boys and girls, mostly school dropouts, are learning trades. Some of them have already started earning little amounts in the workshop of the school. Others have been given a mechanic's kit with necessary instruments to start a simple shop of their own. The sub-centres of SEWA-RURAL are situated in different villages all around at a distance of 5 to 7 kms. where nurses, mostly aged tribal women discuss every week their problems of midwifery with the expert doctors and nurses from the main hospital who visit all these sub-centres every week. Children's centres (Balwadis) are working in many places with provision for regular mid-day meal. In some villages SEWA-RURAL has started the programme of raising plants in large number and utilising them gradually for greening the semidesert areas all around. A new agriculture farm for teaching new techniques of agriculture to villagers is now coming up. Immunisation and other health programmes are going on, along with regular educational and cultural programmes for the village children and adults.

Today after 8 years of its inception SEWA-RURAL covers 40 villages with a population of 45,000 people mostly belonging to the backward and tribal areas of Bharuch district.

It is a quiet team of 20 to 25 persons, mostly young doctors, nurses and a few well-wishers, which runs the entire show. Everyone wishes to remain as a member of the central team. The leaders remain in the

background, despite offering their best for the project. It is a round-the-clock service scheme. In the hospital compound huge portraits of Shri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Holy Mother and Mahatma Gandhi decorate the entrance. In the evening they all gather in their prayer hall, a small mud-house with a thatched roof where they offer prayers, read, and meditate before the pictures of Shri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Holy Mother. This is the nerve-centre round which revolve the various activities of the organisation. Everyone waits for the evening hour of prayer, which is, to them, a regular session for awakening the divine power within, and motivating the self silently, in order to serve 'that God who by the ignorant is called man', as Vivekananda said. Spiritual strength born of silent, unselfish, dedicated work, and Vedantic idea of serving God in man—these two form the ideological foundation of SEWA-RURAL. The lady doctor who received the Sasakawa Award, ended her acceptance speech with these very ideas:

"We strongly believe that to make the implementation effective we need man, man with feelings for people, man with gift. The backbone of our country is spirituality and keeping this in the Centre we try to motivate people. This is done during prayer or in a meeting at the Central level or in the village, by sitting together and evaluating ourselves what we are supposed to do and what we are doing. Of course, this may be in the form of elevating reading, singing or listening to inspiring songs, prayer or meditation. We try to build all our programmes keeping three basics in mind. They are Social Service in which social justice is included along with scientific approach and spiritual outlook, and above all an equitable balance of all the three. What we found easier and conducive to our culture and social life was the spiritual outlook towards life and work. Don't take spiritua-

lity in the traditional or popular meaning. Is not the underlying principle in the humanism of atheist, the love of Christianity, the brotherhood of Islam, the Compassion of Buddhism, the non-violence of Jainism and the divinity of all souls of Hinduism, the same? Probably we may be having answer here whether there is question of implementation of health programmes or even issues like communal riots, nuclear armament, human rights violation or exploitation of one kind or other".

Dr. Desai, a surgeon of 47 and the leader of the team, never comes to the front although he works round-the-clock and holds ninety meetings per month with his own people, Govt. officials and representatives of other organisations. Even in meetings he sits at the back or on the floor along with doctors, nurses and students. What made him leave the comfortable surgeon's life in New York and settle in this village and working silently for these villagers through a big scheme of service where the total amount spent so far (within 7 years) is 2.5 crores both from Govt. and non-Govt. sources? Smilingly he answered:

"Right from the beginning we were feeling that we don't want any life which would make us continue as the "routine life", taking up job, doing some private business which may be medical, but we should work for the poor people. The whole concept of *Daivdhanarayan* (the Lord in the form of the poor) as expounded by Swami Vivekananda—impressed us most."

Even in New York where the pioneering group attended the Sunday services of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta Centres the thought of coming back one day to their own people never got eclipsed. Said Dr. Desai, "We attended the Sunday services in New York as well as some of weekday sessions also. There used to be classes on

the *Gospel*, of Shri Ramakrishna, the *Gita*, the *Upanishads* and that nurtured and nourished our interest in Swamiji's ideas and devotion of Thakur (Shri Ramakrishna), as well as love for the country and also the whole concept of *Daridranarayana* which is based on Advaita and practical Vedanta."

What satisfaction do these brilliant surgeons and doctors get amidst villages far away from the charms of modern life? The answer from Dr. Desai was,

"There are two processes simultaneously going on—one of course, is doing lot of social service and helping other people. That is one thing. But along with this, and in my personal opinion which is more important, is my self-development. While helping, while doing social services in actual field of action the theories of books become practical. When we read the *Gita* and when we read Swamiji, or when we discuss with any of Ramakrishna Mission Swamis, we hear so many things, so many ideas which are written, which are theorised. In a field of action I get every opportunity of putting them in practice and also curbing and sublimating my ego or finding the real joy of helping others. And every hour, on day-to-day basis, it is an opportunity for me to unfold myself and develop myself. And I think the latter part is more important because that takes me nearer to Shri Ramakrishna."

Does this organisation possess, even administrationally, any distinct newness which the other social service organisations do not have? Dr. Desai explained,

"There is a general pessimism all around the country that corruption, and various kinds of disturbing factors are operating in our country. If we, as young professionals

inspired by Swamiji and Mahatma Gandhi, can set an example and thereby bring faith that it is possible to do honest work, to create a platform, or set up an organisation where unselfish social work on the lines of Swamiji can be done, and if we can create this faith and optimism, particularly among the young people, that will be enough. I don't see that there will be many branches of SEWA-RURAL. No. I do not see that there will be some 50 hospitals in Gujarat on the lines of SEWA-RURAL. It may or may not be. But here in our work we have also involved the State Government with us. You see in SEWA-RURAL two important things are happening—Community Participation and Participation of the Government. SEWA-RURAL is trying to create a model where both, the people and the Government can participate. And this can be done along with the spirit of serving God in man, the *Daridranarayana*, along the line of Swamiji's idea."

Why did they send a lady doctor to receive the prestigious Sasakawa Award? Dr. Desai answered,

"In SEWA-RURAL 75% people are female workers. So I thought it was appropriate that some lady worker go and receive the award. The award was for SEWA-RURAL, and it was nice that one representing the major working group, the women, received it on behalf of SEWA-RURAL."

How do they feel today? The leader said with a quiet smile,

"SEWA-RURAL may be seen as a practical attempt to foster and encourage human values through self-development while in the service of the poor. May be it is a small drop in an ocean; but then it is many such drops that make the ocean."

THE GENETS—A STORY OF LIFE-LONG SACRIFICE

SWAMI TATHAGATANANDA

A life above the ordinary and a search for fulfilment in one's higher self have been the quest for many genuine souls who have often lived a silent life of dedication and service. Ideas govern and inspire life. Such ideas can even change totally the course of one's life when conveyed through a noble and inspired life. This is the story of a noble family who, inspired by the spiritual idealism of the great luminaries, Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, silently dedicated their lives to the service and cause of Vedanta.

Born in 1906 and 1907 respectively, Jeanne Genet and her younger sister, Rolande, hailed from a well-to-do French Canadian family. Their father held a good government position and the family was comfortable and prosperous. As was a common custom of the time, the sisters attended school as boarders in a Catholic convent. From their early days, the girls felt a pronounced love and admiration for the convent life they witnessed and enjoyed while attending the school. By nature, Jeanne was the more introspective, reserved and quiet, while Rolande was jolly, zealous, self-reliant and fearless. When the young vivacious Rolande was asked if she would like to become a nun, the Sister told her, "My dear, girls like you make the best nuns." Meanwhile, charmed by the sweet angelic repose of the elder Jeanne, the nuns once selected her to play the part of the baby Jesus in their school Christmas play. Their father passed away while the girls were still young. Their mother, known as Maman Genet, who was a well-informed and progressive thinker, subsequently took a bold decision. Apprehensive of the girls' coming under too great an influence of convent life, she first removed the girls from the convent

school and had them privately tutored. Later, in the 1920's, she moved the family to the big city of New York where she felt the girls may have better opportunities to develop their careers. However, despite Maman's best intentions, the two sisters were inevitably destined to lead ideal spiritual lives, though not within the formal enclosure of a convent.

Gifted in piano and violin, Jeanne pursued a musical vocation, while Rolande became an expert dancer. The two sisters were the best of friends and deeply shared and confided in each other's thoughts. At the height of her career, Rolande especially felt the cold touch of that most contagious modern disease—emptiness. She was not to be deceived by the brief blaze of superficial popularity. Rather, she found herself gripped in the search of a meaningful existence. Her life was a saga of daring, pluck and self-confidence, but behind this genial personality, there was a steel frame of discipline and loyalty to the higher calls of life. Amidst the glamour, her noble mind yearned for truth. Rolande was in this state when she was inexorably led to Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Reading the book, *Prophets of New India*, by the French writer, Romain Rolland, which gave the life-accounts of these two great souls, Rolande was drawn from the bustling concourse of friends to the deep holy communion of her inner life. Jeanne Genet, collective and serious in her life and vocation, was also profoundly moved and inspired by this book. In Shri Ramakrishna and his beloved disciple Swami Vivekananda, the girls found the eternal soul of India, radiant, calm and majestic, with a "unifying, pacifying love for all beings." These two messengers of Truth blew like a fresh breeze over the

stagnant pools of religious life the sisters had so long seen. The genuine purity, strength and catholicity of their lives and the eternal message of Vedanta for which they stood—the oneness of existence, the divinity of life, the harmony of religions, the universality of Truth and direct intuitive experience of that Truth—entered the souls of the two sisters, stirring them to their inmost depth; both found themselves in the momentous throes of radical renewal from within. Steadily, their inner lives were being wholly transformed. They came to accept the broad principles of Vedanta, as exemplified in the hallowed lives of Shri Ramakrishna and Swamiji, as their own treasured idealism in life.

In Vedanta, the realisation of the One Supreme Truth is recognised as the ultimate aim of life. The Supreme Reality, called Brahman, is of the nature of pure spiritual consciousness—self-effulgent, indivisible, immutable, pure bliss and Absolute knowledge—the One unity behind the apparent multiplicity of the world. Vedanta is non-dogmatic, non-credal and non-historical and presents a total way of life for realising the Truth within one's self. The essence of our self is called the Atman, and this reality behind the human personality and the reality behind the universe is to be experienced as one and the same abiding Supreme Reality as it was revealed in the hearts of the Vedic mystics of old. In the present age, Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda bore witness to this eternal Truth in their holy lives and teachings. Caught in the power of their divine magnetism and the lofty message of Vedanta, the two sisters were soon to devote their entire beings to their service, and to the realisation of Truth in their lives.

With keen interest, the girls discovered a church listing for the Vedanta Society of New York, founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1894, in the *New York Times*. It was 1933, and one Sunday both Jeanne and

Rolande came to the Society on West 71st Street to hear Swami Bodhananda, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who gave a lecture on Vedanta. Swami Bodhananda had come to New York in 1906, the year of Jeanne's birth, and became Head of the Society in 1912. Their acquaintance ripened into a soul-enriching friendship. Gradually, the Swami became for them a true spiritual father—their best friend, philosopher and guide. His purity of vision and innate saintliness kindled a sincere enthusiasm in their hearts for a holy life. Under him, they applied themselves to spiritual practice, studied the teachings of Vedanta, and learned Sanskrit. Their minds were lifted high above the ordinary way of life, and they felt that they had truly found their true home in the Vedanta Society.

To be nearer to the Society, the family shifted its residence to an apartment on the same street of the Society. As time passed, Rolande felt drawn more closely and fully to the Society. Swamiji's message of selfless service was coursing through her veins. She weighed the heavy anchor of domestic love and personal ambition and then took a momentous decision to follow her heart's calling. It revealed the first glimmer of her selfless dedication. The Society was in need and Rolande responded completely. Everyone was struck by her transparent sincerity, her disarming frankness, breadth of vision, fervour for the cause of Vedanta and enthusiasm for a dedicated life.

Swami Bodhananda passed away in 1950, after which, Maman Genet naturally tried to persuade Rolande to return to a comfortable way of life at home. She could not at that time visualise the depth and dimension of her child's spiritual outlook. But before Rolande's fire of faith and dedicated service, her revered mother's reasonings and loving entreaties melted away. In the name of humanism, friends and well-wishers also tried their wits to dissuade her from the

cause of Vedanta. Rolande, however, was well-grounded in Truth and was gifted with a native spiritual strength and vitality, together with an invincible will to follow her chosen path. Humanism has its centre in man and its circumference in Society, while Vedantic idealism has its centre in God or the Supreme Truth, and its circumference in humanity. Rolande valiantly held fast to her ground and refused to be dislodged in spite of veiled threats, disparaging remarks and social boycott.

The Vedanta Society passed through a very trying period upon the Swami's demise. For a time, there was no spiritual leader, and sympathy and finance were lacking. The very nature of nobility is such that it will meet rebuffs of fortune with cheerful courage and undying faith. Rolande was such. She was never more content than when she found herself in some trouble which obliged her to have recourse to God. She was prepared to face any woe, despair and even agony for the life-giving cause of Vedanta. Her entire being was completely identified with the Vedanta Society, and her love for it burnt like a flame in her heart. She felt no weariness even though the living situation in the Society's ground floor where she resided was most unsatisfactory at the time. To help financially, some rooms in the Society's building were rented, as was the custom in New York City brownstones, and Rolande's was most ascetic. Nonetheless, her patience, forbearance, stoicism and enthusiasm for the life never flagged. Rather, she was energized to the highest pitch of activity for the sacred work of the Society. She always felt that there was not enough she could do to show her eternal gratitude to the source of spiritual fulfilment which she had found in Vedanta.

Rolande's spirit was infectious and Jeanne was wholly inspired by her sister's dedication. She was verily a spiritual cinder waiting for a spark from the divine fire to be

set ablaze. Maman, who was innately noble in character, loved her daughters dearly. Seeing their zeal and determination, she did not prevent them from pursuing that path in which they were finding true peace and happiness. In 1952, Swami Pavitrananda, a disciple of the first President of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Brahmananda, was sent from India to serve the Society as its spiritual leader (which he did till he breathed his last in 1977). After some time, at his invitation, both Maman and Jeanne came to live with Rolande in the Society's building and gave up their apartment up the street. This was another memorable moment in the history of the Society. If the arrangement was already difficult for one person, imagine the difficulty for three sharing the same quarters, particularly for Maman who was accustomed to comfort and wealth. At first, she did not share the attitude of her daughters, but because she was dedicated to them she also gradually followed in their wake. Maman possessed depth in thought, a calm strength, heroic courage and a capacity for and pleasure in good work. Kindled by the love and sincerity of her daughters' hearts, her motherliness finally triumphed, and she came to share in their daily lives and the life of the Society. In order to allow Rolande and Maman freely give their time fully in service to the Society, Jeanne took it upon herself to support the family. She gave away her piano in charity when she moved into the Society and pursued a secretarial career. This, however, proved to be an invaluable experience for Jeanne who was to become the future Secretary of the Society—a devoted service which she has faithfully and efficiently rendered to this day.

The two sisters simply loved the Society, and the Genet family gladly accepted the obligations of the Society as their very own. The worth of a person may be seen by the manner in which difficulties are surmounted and responsibilities are met. The picture of

their lives is noble and exemplary in every way. It is a life of self-denial and self-forgetfulness; it does not expect any personal gain, even spiritually, for so enwrapped does the heart become in having the good fortune and sacred privilege in serving its cherished idealism that it does not find any mood or time to even think of its own salvation or freedom. It is lost in the quiet joy and fulfilment of loving and serving what it understands to be the highest and best. This was the spirit of the Genets. Swami Pavitranda used to especially refer to the small kitchen where Rolande cooked for the Society as "Rolande's shrine". Many a weary heart has been comforted and refreshed over a hot cup of tea which the Genet family graciously offered to friends of the Society.

Swami Vivekananda's message of infinite strength of the Self within and service to God in man, has a remarkable power of generating an undying enthusiasm in sincere hearts. His message severely tested the Genets' labour of love for the Society. But they each remained pure and true to the message of the prophet, steady and bright till the very last. Even when Rolande became fatally ill, she did not waver or flinch in her selfless service to the Society, but worked heart and

soul to the end, inspiring others by her quiet joy and assurance of living with God. Something of the universal love of God shone through her, giving her features an unmistakable luminosity that was manifest to everyone even when she breathed her last. In 1960, at the age of 53, on Good Friday, she passed away in full consciousness at the Society leaving behind her a magnificent record of silent service of 27 years. Maman and Jeanne followed in and maintained the blazing trail. In due course Maman became a pillar of the Society. Her inner experience transformed her entire outlook, widened her horizon and enlarged her heart. It endowed her with the power to translate her rich experience into action. Her enduring love and genuine sense of fun made the ground floor of the Society a second home for many. She passed away peacefully in April of 1977 at the age of 95, and like Rolande, remained active till the very end. Jeanne continues to carry the banner of the Genet legacy. She is a picture of dedication, serenity and enlightenment, sweetness and kindness itself, yet she is the very soul of unshakable strength and fortitude—a constant reminder of the spirit for which the Vedanta Society stands and upon which it was founded by Swamiji.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

FOLK AND FAIRIE TALES: THEIR HIDDEN MEANING EXPLORED—BY KELEDON NADDAIR

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"Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as Doves", invokes the author at the end. The book under review is a sojourn into Keltic Shamanistic lore, into the

symbolism of minerals, plants, birds, animals, fairie beings, wild folks as also beliefs about other worlds. Nine tales are related here.

Who are kelts? asks the discerning reader. The kelts were an Indo-European race thought to be blond, high cheeked and fierce akin to Aryans. They spread, conquered and settled from Ireland to Russia. Their ancestry goes back to Bronze Age. They were metal experts and imposed them-

selves on the natives but mixed with them and adjusted to the local ethos-ecology. Supernatural ruled their hearts and dominated their minds giving birth to mythology and magic, sorcery and superstition, Necromancy and Geomancy, cabal and abracadabra, shamans and Druids. It is all very akin to Tantra in India. It reveals to us how rich, imaginative and profound was their culture woven around by legends of celtic mythology. And celtic mythology has its roots in Indo-European spirituality issuing forth from indubitable experiential realities like black cat crossing one's path or sneeze before a move.

After hunger, sex is our greatest problem. Beyond these but included is the life of Spirit-Body-Mind and Spirit/Soul-the three dimensions. That gives us a pause whether to cultivate the flesh or the spirit. While on the horns of such a dilemma, Voltaire declared ; "If there is no God ; we have to invent One". The Gods remain constant. (P 166). "I came not from this land cried I, I came from the land where secrets lie, your races migrate, change and die. My people are immortal and never die for we have never left these mountains, forests, sea and sky", Says the spirit in the book.

That impels and counsels us to choosing an occult/spiritual path and rest our discretion in esoteric belief. Such things and thoughts are part of the racial memory and are the stuff of the living legends. Tales are narrated but the interpretation of tales and signs is the news behind news. So often a personal dream or a vision in rare moments of life gives a glimpse of living experience past, present or future. Unseen forces are always at work. Recall Hamlet,

"Sometimes our indiscretion serves us will ; and that should teach us. There is a divinity that shapes our ends. Rough hew them, how we will".

Or Macbeth,

"A, Heavenly powers that tend on mortal beings, come and unsex me here"

The book is not an escape from life but an escape into life heightened by the supernatural element exploring higher possibilities of life. It will be a denial of the possible reality to dismiss the whole thing as mere blind belief or unscientific because there is some divine Arithmetic that counts and accounts in our lives. Experience psychic or otherwise, makes for rites and rituals that go to make our godman important especially sought by men in adversity. Totems, philtres, lucky stones and metals are resorted to create a happier situation. Birds, beasts and trees are adopted as insignia in heraldic devices and military formations.

"Great things are done when men and mountains meet. This is not done by jostling in the streets". The author laments that mere rational analysts have become divorced from signs, omens, hidden messages and all the ingredients of truly magical life as a result of adverse conditioning. One should realise that soul-essence of a being cannot be explained by studying the anatomical workings of its physical parts. To relish the book and for a rewarding experience one should be prepared to deal/ encounter with non physical beings or situations. The study may bring ESP or a power to divine things to avert a mishap or turn a liability into an asset.

The book is not for ordinary readers as it requires concentration and application and deep study. Faith and willing suspension of disbelief are other requirements for an understanding.

The book has a mystic halo. The charts, calenders and figures illustrate the meaning where words are inadequate for an indepth understanding.

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PRACTICAL HINTS FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

OM

The repetition of this (*OM*) and meditating on its meaning (is the way).

Why should there be repetition? We have not forgotten the theory of Samskaras, that the sum total of impressions lives in the mind. They become more and more latent but remain there, and as soon as they get the right stimulus, they come out. Molecular vibration never ceases. When this universe is destroyed, all the massive vibrations disappear; the sun, moon, stars, and earth, melt down; but the vibrations remain in the atoms. Each atom performs the same function as the big worlds do. So even when the vibrations of the *Chitta* subside, its molecular vibrations go on, and when they get the impulse, come out again. We can now understand what is meant by repetition. It is the greatest stimulus that can be given to the spiritual Samskaras. "One moment of company with the holy makes a ship to cross this ocean of life." Such is the power of association. So this repetition of *Om*, and thinking of its meaning, is keeping good company in your own mind.

Is there any material sound of which all other sounds must be manifestations, one which is the most natural sound? *Om* (*aum*) is such a sound, the basis of all sounds. The first letter, A, is the root sound, the key, pronounced without touching any part of the tongue or palate: M represents the last sound in the series, being produced by the closed lips, and the U rolls from the very root to the end of the sounding board of the mouth. Thus, *Om* represents the whole phenomena of sound-producing. As such, it must be the natural symbol, the matrix of all the various sounds. It denotes the whole range and possibility

of all the words that can be made. Apart from these speculations, we see that around this word *Om* are centred all the different religious ideas in India; all the various religious ideas of the Vedas have gathered themselves round this word *Om*. What has that to do with America and England, or any other country? Simply this, that the word has been retained at every stage of religious growth in India, and it has been manipulated to mean all the various ideas about God. Monists, dualists, mono-dualists, Separatists, and even atheists took up this *Om*. *Om* has become the one symbol for the religious aspiration of the vast majority of human beings. Take, for instance the English word God. It covers, only a limited function, and if you go beyond it, you have to add adjectives, to make it Personal, or Impersonal, or Absolute God. So with the words for God in every other language; their signification is very small. This word *Om*, however, has around it all the various significances. As such it should be accepted by everyone.

The first manifestation of the repetition and thinking of *Om* is that the introspective power will manifest more and more, all the mental and physical obstacles will begin to vanish.

Concentration will bring perfect repose to mind and body every time it is practised. When the practice has been misdirected, or not enough controlled, these disturbances come. Repetition of *Om* and self-surrender to the Lord will strengthen the mind, and bring fresh energy. The nervous shakings will come to almost everyone. Do not mind them at all, but keep on practising. Practice will cure them, and make the seat firm.

—SWAMI VIVEKANANDA
(compiled from the *Raja-Yoga*)

Arise! awake! and stop not till the goal is reached! Katha Upa. I. iii. 14

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THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD

In the word, 'Nature' we find the clue which leads to the idea of 'The Motherhood' of God. Nature is the produced or, better still perhaps, the producer, the born or that which bears. We know nothing of the mode of being of God, and it is quite arguable,—We believe it has long been held in India,—that Nature has been the Mother of God, in any sense in which God is conscious. The Universe, says Swami Abhedananda, is a cosmos, one harmonious whole; and behind every step of evolution there is some orderly hidden purpose and energy. It is that purpose, that energy, which gives birth to all forms of life and intelligence. 'Thou art the *Para Prakriti*,' says an ancient Indian writing, 'the divine energy of the Supreme Being. Of Thee is born everything of the Universe; therefore Thou art the Mother of the Universe?' 'Wherever there is the expression of any force or power in the Universe, there is the manifestation of the eternal *Prakriti* or the Divine Mother—Mother, because that energy contains the phenomenal Universe, projects it into space and preserves it when it is born.' Brahma himself is her child, and the Hindus have worshipped her time out of mind. In the Rig Veda, the most ancient of the Hindu Scriptures, the Divine Mother is made to say:—

I am the Queen of the universe, the giver of all wealth and fruits of works. I am intelligent and omniscient. Although I am one, by My

powers I appear as manifold. I cause war for protecting men, I kill the enemy and bring peace on earth. I stretch out heaven and earth. I have produced the Father. As the wind blows by itself, so I produce all phenomena by My own will. I am independent and responsible to none. I am beyond the sky, beyond this earth, My glory is the phenomenal universe; such am I by My power.

'Thus', says Swami Abhedananda, 'we see the Divine Mother is all in all. We live and move and have our existence in that Divine Mother.'

The influence of this fundamental idea is felt, says the Swami, all over India:—

As woman represents motherhood on earth, therefore, all women, whether married or unmarried, are representatives of that Almighty Divine Mother of the universe. It is for this reason women are so highly revered and honoured by the Hindus. India is the only country in the world where God the Supreme Being is worshiped in the form of a woman as the Divine Mother of the Universe. In India the wives do not adopt their husbands' name, they do not merge their individuality into their husbands' as they do in the West, but they keep their own name separate. If a wife's name is Radha, and her husband's name be Krishna, and if we say them together, we should say Radha-Krishna and never Krishna-Radha. The wife's name must be said first.